THE RANE:

A LEGEND OF

the Indian Mutiny.

BY

GILLEAT

Virtus propter se.

Godfrey Radcliffe,

DAN-Y-GRAIG.

SMITHSONIAN
ALREADY
SCANNED

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(1857-58).

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PREFACE.

THE author of "The Rane, or a Legend of the Indian Mutiny," in submitting the following narrative to the public, does not claim to himself any merit for originality of invention, a great number of the events recorded having really taken place, and some of them being well known historical facts.

In deference to the feelings of relatives or connections (who may still be living), of those who have formed the *dramatis personæ* of the work; names of persons and places have been altered, and changed, so as to avoid in any way lacerating or renewing feelings of sorrow and regret, which time (the great solacer and soother of all grief) has, it is hoped, long since healed or softened.

The author, though writing under an assumed name, was actually a witness to numbers of the occurrences described, and took an active part in many of the adventures and tragic scenes of the Indian Mutiny and Rebellion of 1857-58, which so nearly lost England one of the brightest gems of her crown; and though the period in which these memorable

events (at the time they happened, so thrillingly interesting to the whole English nation), took place, has long since passed, yet the remembrance of, and the daring courage and devotion of our countrymen and country women, in these perilous times, when the honour of England was—by them—so loyally and bravely upheld, will for ever hold a place in history, and will remain green in the memory, and be proudly recalled, by generations of their descendants.

With the above few words as preface, the author sends forth this, his unpretentious narrative of incidents and occurrences, which transpired, now, nearly thirty years ago, and ventures to solicit from his readers and the public, a lenient consideration of all the (no doubt) many imperfections and defects there may be found in it.

THE RANE:

A LEGEND of the INDIAN MUTINY.

CHAPTER I.

"GOOD morning Mac, well met old man; I was just thinking of looking you up on my way home. Have you had any late news from Cawnpore since I saw you? Are the 'Pandies' more inclined to hear reason, or do you think it's to be a case of war to the knife? If so, God help our ladies and children!"

This remark was made on a dazzling, dusty, and intensely hot May morning, in the middle of the memorable year A.D, 1857 (commonly called the year of the Indian Mutiny) by Lieutenant Peter Burgess, of the 20th Irregular Horse, to Captain Donald McBean, an assistant Commissioner in a small civil station in Bundelkund, Central India, which for convenience sake we shall call Ranepore.

"Yes," replied McBean, "bad news flies quickly. I have just been told by a person, I have every confidence in, that matters are fast drifting into as desperate a state of chaos as they can be, and that nothing will now bring the infatuated fools (for they deserve no better name) to reason. General Wheeler, I hear, is said to think that before long the Nana and Sepahees will make common cause. You may well say Burgess, God help our poor ladies and children! They will

have a hard time of it, and should be sent off to Bombay or Calcutta for England at once; but then, it must be remembered, it's a long and risky journey, in the present hot weather, and in the disturbed state of the country a trustworthy escort is difficult to be had, when we do not even place confidence in our own men. But, talking of that, how are your fellows inclined to act? The gallant Irregulars have proved their pluck and fidelity before now, in many a hard fought hand-to-hand affair; do you think they will now desert their officers and their salt, and become 'Namak-harāms?'"

"Well, there is no saying," replied Burgess, "Colville, their commanding officer, and mine, has every confidence in them, but I must confess I have but little, and I strongly suspect that the Havildar-Major Laltabade (of the Infantry Regiment) is a rascal and a traitor at heart, and I have but little faith in the men, whom he appears to lead just as he pleases. I must say my candid opinion is that they will go with the tide, which appears setting in so strongly against us, and will declare for the King of Delhi when they think the proper time has come for doing so. They are ripe for mutiny and bloodshed, a point to which our friend, Tabade, has succeeded but too well in bringing them."

The words, "What is that you say, Burgess?" spoken in a loud angry voice, proceeding from one of the bastions of a small star-shaped fort, standing in the vicinity of the spot where this conversation occurred, surprised and slightly startled the two young men, who, believing themselves alone, were conversing in confidence; and immediately afterwards the fine stalwart and soldier-like figure of Major Colville appeared, stepping quickly forward and approaching them, "What is that you say, Burgess, about our men; do you presume to question their staunchness and fidelity? Young man, it ill becomes a 'griffin,' as I may almost call you, to asperse the character of one of the oldest and most faithful regiments in the Honourable Company's army! When I was a youngster, we of the sabre had more *ésprit de corps* in

our little fingers than the present generation have in their whole bodies. Sir, let me hear no more, I beg, of such ill-timed fancies and opinions."

Young Burgess, or Peter, as he was familiarly called by his intimate friends, looked hurt, and well he might do so, at the words and tone of his commanding officer's speech, for such Major Colville was, and Peter had always held him in the greatest respect, but had now some difficulty in refraining from making an angry reply. Contenting himself, however, with formally saluting his commanding officer, by touching his cap (they were both in uniform), he said, "I am indeed sorry, sir, that any thing I may have remarked should have called forth the displeasure of so kind a friend as I have always found you to be, but you will do me the justice, I trust, to acknowledge that what I did say was not intended for you to hear. I shall, however, be more careful for the future."

Here Peter proved the truth of that old, and by the wise always to be remembered maxim of Solomon, that "a soft answer turneth away wrath." Major Colville reddened slightly at his reply, thinking perhaps it implied that he had no right to listen to what was not intended for him to hear; at the same time, Peter's gentlemanly and respectful tone and speech did away with all feeling of resentment and irritation, and the more natural and generous tendencies of his nature prevailed.

"Never mind Peter," he said, "I was somewhat nettled and annoyed by thinking that a slight was being put on men whom I have trusted, and would trust with my life with the greatest confidence. But you say rightly, the remark was not intended for me; not that it was any fault of mine that I should by mere chance have been passing by and heard it; but pray don't think any more about the matter. I gather from your being in harness you have been attending parade this morning. Did you find all in a satisfactory state?"

"Yes, sir, I am just on my way back. I inspected the men, horses, and arms, and found all in the best order,"

replied Burgess, who was acting adjutant of the regiment during the absence of the permanent adjutant in England on furlough

McBean proposed that they should proceed to his bungalow, which was near, to have "Chota-Hazare" or early breakfast, and the three strolled towards it, conversing as they went along on general topics, and entered the verandah of McBean's house, where all the usual preparations for "Chota-Hazare" had been made by his servants in expectation of their master's and his friends arrival. And very enjoyable did these arrangements look in the shady verandah, facing a cool green space of garden; where, on that sultry May morning, a pair of long-suffering bullocks, under the guiding hand of the native gardener were at their accustomed work, drawing a cold, clear, sparkling stream of water (from the deep stone-built well), which was carried over the garden by small masonry drains; on leaving which it was eagerly drank up by the dry thirsty soil, parched and hardened by many a day's hot burning sun, such as is unknown to the more fortunate inhabitants of northern lands. By this arrangement there was created a pleasant, cool, artificial, though temporary atmosphere, smelling fresh and reviving to those who now came under its influence.

"Abdulla 'garam pani low' bring the hot water, see that it boils, and look sharp about it," called out McBean.

"What will you have, major, tea or coffee, they are both at your service? I prefer the former myself in this weather, it's not so heating as coffee. I can strongy recommend my fresh butter, it's made at home from the cream of my own dairy, which is the only way to get it good in India; but even with every care, I find that rascal, the 'Gowlie,' is apt to play tricks, and water the milk."

"Thank you," replied Major Colville, "I'll trouble you for a cup of tea."

Abdulla and Kurem, McBean's two Mahomedan servants, now entered with various tempting dishes, suitable to the

occasion, consisting of sardines delicately cooked in vine leaves, a tasty kidney omelet, and an appetising dish of smoking hot fried ham and eggs. These were discussed with such appetites as had been left to the party by the weakening and enervating influences of an Indian hot weather. Then followed cigars, and our friends, who were all smokers, placed themselves under the soothing influence of tobacco, that alleviator and solacer of so many troubles, and at their ease, with their legs propped up against the verandah pillars (a position said to be an aid to the languid circulation so common to those who have long resided in hot climates) forgot all cares and troubles, at least for a time.

And while they are taking their ease, we ask our reader's forbearance if we indulge ourselves in a short description of that most popular Indian meal, familiarly called "Chota-Hazare."

There are few, we are inclined to believe, who have resided in the East, but who are familiar with this most enjoyable morning repast—at which our fellow-countrymen and women on returning from their hot, tiring, dusty parade, or early ride or walk, meet for social intercourse and friendly conversation, in the cool hours of a tropical morning, to discuss, under the influence of a cheering and refreshing cup of tea, not only their own immediate affairs, but not unfrequently those of their neighbours, and sometimes proceed, it is to be feared, even summarily to pass sentence on them, often indeed scarcely mindful of the beam that obscures their own vision, while they attempt to pluck out the mote from that of their friends and associates.

We can, however, with confidence assert, that there is no meal either in England or among our continental neighbours that in any way resembles "Chota-Hazare" in India. As a promoter of sociability it is unequalled, though it may happen in some instances when persons of uncongenial temperaments and nature meet (perhaps irritated by impaired digestion and the effects of a trying climate, into a state of feeling some-

what the reverse of that inculcated in the commandment in connection with duty to a neighbour), they now and then disagree; yet, on the whole, there can be no doubt but this morning gathering of friends may fairly be regarded as a great promoter of good fellowship and kind feeling.

These cheerful assemblies frequently take place at the house of the leading lady of the station, commonly called a "Burra Meem Sahib," and are presided over by her. She is often the wife of the Commissioner or Judge when there are such people (which is generally the case in large, mixed, civil and military stations); or, where the purely military element alone exists, the wife of the commanding officer perhaps takes the lead. As may be conceived, a good deal depends on the idiosyncrasy of the lady, the head of society. Should she be deservedly a favourite and popular, then her "Chota-Hazare" parties are only too willingly attended, and vastly liked. Formal invitations to them are not considered requisite, all drop in *sans ceremonie*, to partake of the good cheer, from the grey-bearded argumentative old major, of twenty years' standing, to the gushing young ensign (for in the days we are writing of there were ensigns) who counts but eighteen summers, has just joined his regiment, and who has not even got over his taste for bread and jam, whose light budding moustache is his greatest pride, and which he hopes will some day rival the dark bushy fringe which ornaments the upper lip of the dashing Captain Goodfellow, who commands his company, and most judiciously snubs him when occasion requires.

"Chota-Hazare" is generally laid out in an open verandah, or sometimes, in very warm weather, under a shady tree in the garden. On the table are to be seen dishes of various sorts and kinds, but the principal and most common are vast piles of hot buttered toast, perhaps flanked by a muffin, carefully prepared by the comely hand of the mistress of the house herself.

At the more pretensious repasts of this sort are to be seen

highly-flavoured dishes, omelets, cold fowls, tastily prepared cutlets, and kindred dainties, with fruit of different descriptions, such as mangoes, figs, grapes, guavas, and the like when in season. These, combined with tea and coffee, form a tempting, though perhaps somewhat dyspeptic early morning meal.

The beverages referred to are the particular care of the lady of the house, who presides over the tea and coffee pots, and dispenses her refreshing cups with a hearty good will, and a kind familiar nod of recognition to her guests as they drop in by ones and twos, and take their accustomed seats at her hospitable table. We feel confident that the number is not few of those who have sojourned in India, be they "Qui hies," "Ducks," or "Mulls," who will willingly endorse these assertions, and who, even now, among the comforts and conveniences of social life in England, sometimes experience a longing for the cheerful and chatty companionship of the "Chota-Hazare" table.

The station where the events we are about to describe took place was, as mentioned above, not a large one. The civil community consisted of a Commissioner, the ruler of the division of which Ranepore was the chief district, where both the head-quarters of the military as well as the civil community were located.

The military element stationed in Ranepore, was composed of a Bengal regiment of native infantry, as also an irregular cavalry one, the former commanded by Colonel Partridge, and the latter by Major Colville, the acquaintance of whom our readers have already made. Both of these officers were faithful, tried servants of "The Honourable John Company," as "The East India Company" was in these days familiarly called. They had from their boyhood made India their home, and had but remote and distant hopes and intentions of visiting their native land again. They lived but for their men, and had the most implicit, though, as will be hereafter seen, misplaced confidence in them. Such was the type, now

fast dying out, of the old Indian officers of 1857, who rendered such valuable help in the time of need, and who did not hesitate to sacrifice even their lives at the altar of duty, preferring death at their posts, rather than distrust those men whose fidelity they had been taught from boyhood to believe in, and who upheld with their last breath the authority of the Government they were proud to serve.

It is in reference to such that the late Governor-General of India, Lord Canning, in his minute dated 2nd July, 1859, says:—

"It becomes my grateful duty to bring to the notice of Her Majesty's Secretary of State, the names of these earnest, devoted men, by whose abilities, sound judgment, and unexampled labours, the civil authority of the British Government has been upheld and re-established.

"Although civilians by profession or holding for the time civil offices, the duties they have performed have for the most part been full of peril and toil. Only some few of them have been called on, occasionally, to take part in the operations of the army, and have thereby had the satisfaction of seeing honour done to their names in the *Gazette* of the day; but there are others who have been distinguished by conduct in front of the enemy which would make any army proud of them.

"They have organised levies and led them, defended stations, kept in check large dissatisfied communities, reassured the wavering, and given confidence to the loyal.

"Many of them have, in the service of the State, carried their lives in their hands for months together. Their position has been such as to try not only their physical courage, but the judgment, intelligence, and self-reliance of each individual, and to keep their faculties incessantly on the strain.

"The most anxious part of their task is now over, and I confidently claim for them, from Her Majesty's Government, the same respect, admiration, and gratitude, as have been so deservedly bestowed upon their fellow-labourers in the army."

Whether the reward claimed for the officers referred to in the above minute by the Governor-General of India has been realised by many of them, is a question unsuited for discussion in a book such as this professes to be; but we much fear that in some instances, at least, bitter has been the disappointment, and hope deferred has made the hearts of not a few sad.

At the time our story commences India was, and had been for years, in a state of profound peace, but in the months of March and April, 1857, rumours of dissatisfaction began to pervade the air, and shortly afterwards events occurred which rudely shook belief in the loyalty of the Bengal army in the minds of those who had the best opportunities of forming a judgment of it, and who had not allowed long-standing prejudices to blind them, as to what was really the feeling existing in the hidden thoughts of almost all natives as to the probability of the termination of British power and influence in India. Among those stood prominently forward Colonel Norman McLeod, the commissioner of the division, with whom our story has to do, and his subordinate officers, Major Gordon, deputy-commissioner of Ranepore, and his immediate assistants, Captain McBean, Mr. Ross, and Mr. Erskine.

CHAPTER II.

BEFORE proceeding with our narrative, it is desirable that we should make our readers acquainted with the *dramatis personæ* who are to figure before them in it.

The principal person, as we have before stated, in the small European community of Ranepore was Colonel McLeod. He had some thirty years before left his Highland home as a cadet in the Bengal army, and had, after remaining in military employment for about ten years, and having seen a good deal of active service, accepted a civil appointment, and had risen step by step from the rank of Assistant Commissioner to the position he now held.

During his long period of service he had but once visited his native land, and the highland glen where he had been born.

Being of an old Highland family, he had been received with no inconsiderable degree of enthusiasm by the few remaining adherents of his ancestors who had not been induced to relinquish the land and possessions of their forefathers, to form deer forests and grouse preserves for the once despised, and now little respected "Sassanach," whose powerful gold had proved itself but a too strong temptation to the poor but proud highlanders of Glen Urguhart.

Norman McLeod then renewed his acquaintance with a cousin whom he had left "a lassie wi' lint white locks," a mere child, not reaching much above his elbow. He found her a full-grown handsome woman, of a simple and affectionate nature, and one he thought would make his home in

India cheerful and happy, "a penniless lass wi' a lang pedigree;" and he married Jessie McLean, and never, as yet, had he had cause to repent his choice.

McLeod was a man of iron nerves and a determined will. To give an instance of this,—many years before the events we are now chronicling he happened to be stationed on the sea coast in India, with his regiment, and as was frequently his habit, one morning he went accompanied by two brother officers, his companions, to take a swim in the sea. The part of the coast they bathed in was infested by sharks, though, as yet, no European had been injured by them.

They were all three fairly good swimmers, and imprudently ventured out further to sea than was customary.

McLeod's companions names were Carruthers and Bloomfield, and they had not been long in the water when the latter, who was furthest out called for help, saying that a shark was attacking him. McLeod and his friend, Carruthers, without hesitating, struck out towards him, splashing and shouting in hopes of frightening away the shark, and this they succeeded in doing, but on coming near Bloomfield, they found he had been severely bitten in the leg, and the water was dyed with his blood.

McLeod called out "keep up, old fellow, here we are," and at once placed his powerful hand under the wounded man's arm, telling Carruthers to do so likewise on the other side; and thus they began striking out for the shore, assisting their friend who was in a fainting condition, and preventing his sinking.

They had not, however, succeeded in lessening the distance they had to swim, by more than a few feet, when on looking back McLeod saw a small black triangular object just above the surface of the water, about five yards behind them, slowly following. This he knew to be the fin of their enemy, the shark, and that he contemplated attacking them again. His situation, as may well be believed, was a very trying one, and many a man, even of good courage and nerve would

have, perhaps, thought of his own safety, and made the best of his way to the shore, irrespective of his wounded friend; but this was not the stuff McLeod was made of. All he did was to take a firmer grip of Bloomfield, and speaking encouragingly to Carruthers, who was the youngest of the three, he told him of his danger, and at the same time said that he, alone, now felt capable of bringing Bloomfield to the shore, if Carruthers felt that he could bear the strain on his nerves no longer. He was answered, however, by his plucky friend who said, "Don't think so badly of me as that I should desert you, old fellow," and with a loud shout, and a strong kick and splash to frighten the shark, they continued to swim steadily towards the shore, and at last landed poor Bloomfield, though badly wounded and bleeding, safely on the beach.

Such was the man who now held the helm of affairs in Ranepore at the commencement of the eventful period at which our narrative opens—and never was there a time or place where such qualities as he possessed were more necessary.

Next in rank and importance, in the civil community, came Major Shalto Gordon, the deputy-commissioner, or district officer of Ranepore. Although he had not passed the period of time in India, which his immediate superior officer had, yet Gordon's experience was not trifling. He had risen to the rank he held, both in the army and civil employ, at the age of thirty-five. He was, likewise, of an old highland family, and had come to India owing to the wastefulness of his father, who, at his death, left the ancient entailed family estate to his son, encumbered with debt, and without a shilling to keep it up with. So Gordon had, much against his feelings and wishes, bid good-bye to the old house and lands of Abermore, with, however, the fondly-cherished hope of some day returning to them, with means such as would enable him to live on them with some degree of comfort, and keep up such state as became a highland laird of ancient family and descent.

He was also a determined character, and by nature well suited to the trying and eventful period of which we now write.

Some years before Gordon had come into Central India, he had been employed on special duty among the hill tribes in Orissa, in the suppression of human sacrifies, to which the hill tribes in that part of India are addicted, and had, on one occasion, accompanied by a party of Sepahees, come up only just in time to prevent the cruel sacrifice to the Goddess Bhawani of a very beautiful hill girl, whose fate had led her to be selected by her tribe as an offering to the Goddess of Destruction, to ensure a good harvest, and to avert evil influences from the tribe. Her name was Elsie, and Gordon did what was considered by his friends a very foolish thing,—he married her; the ceremony being performed by a missionary, who, in his wanderings in Orissa, happened to be in the vicinity of Gordon's camp.

There were but few, and those only Gordon's most intimate friends, who were aware that the ceremony of marriage had been gone through between him and Elsie. The public, generally, were under the impression that she held but the position of his mistress.

She, however, troubled her head but little concerning the opinion, either good or bad, of those about her. Being most devotedly attached to her husband, she was content to live in retirement, and was seldom seen by any but Gordon's personal or intimate acquaintances and friends.

We have already referred to Captain McBean in our opening chapter. He was a most popular man and a vast favourite with all, and he richly deserved the good opinion in which he was held. He had left his regiment but three years before, and had commenced his career in civil employ as an assistant commissioner, and we now find him in that capacity in the Ranepore district.

Mr. Ross had also been about a similar period in the Ranepore Commission. He belonged to the uncovenanted

branch of the civil service; had come out to India to seek his fortune, and had been so lucky (through the interest of a distant relation, holding a well-paid office in Calcutta), as to be appointed an extra assistant commissioner, under Major Gordon, for whom he had the highest respect and esteem.

Dr. Bailie, the civil surgeon of Ranepore was, like very many of his class in India, better acquainted with matters connected with conviviality and good-fellowship, than those affecting the health and well-doing of the human body. He had, however, this merit, at any rate, knowing little of medicine, he never tried experiments on those coming under his care, and wisely left dame nature a good deal of latitude, a policy which frequently resulted in the perfect restoration of his patients to health; for which the old doctor did not hesitate to take credit to himself.

He was a stout, fair complexioned man, remarkably fond of good living himself, a capital cook, and always ready and willing to lend his valuable aid to others when a "Burra-khana" or large dinner was to come off.

He was great in catering for balls and "pic-nics," and few could concoct so appetising a sauce, or mix the ingredients of a savoury stew or curry, with the old doctor sahib.

As before stated, having a thorough belief in the healing effects and powers of nature, he had, on one occasion, been heard to say: "I don't believe in medicine, though, as a matter of course, professionally, I am obliged to prescribe it;" but this speech, it is believed, was made after the doctor had been "drinking freely of the Brook-Simkin," or in other words, had partaken largely of champagne, a wine he was particularly addicted to, and which, in a Pickwickian sense, might be considered as his "special vanity." At the same time he qualified the above expression of opinion by adding: "but, as regards my abilities as a surgeon, old Bob Bailie is game to back himself to take off an arm or leg artistically with any of the most skilful followers of Esculapius."

His wife, for he had one, had not been able to follow the

French fashion of small families, but had yearly presented poor Bob with an olive branch, and on one occasion had even been guilty of the offence of bringing two into the world at the same time; but this last proceeding, fortunately for the doctor, was an exceptional one.

At the present period she was living in England, employed in superintending the education of her children, all of whom were with her, except her eldest daughter, Katie, (a very pretty and fascinating girl), who kept house for her father at Ranepore.

The above were the leading members of the European community of the station at the time our narrative opens. There were, also, many others holding less important positions in it, whom, as our story progresses, we hope to have the pleasure of introducing to our readers.

The day to which we have referred in our opening chapter, was one on which an invitation to hold a conference regarding the evidently increasing disturbance in the state of affairs had been given to all heads of departments and principal European officials residing at Ranepore, by a person called Rane Luchme Bhie, of Ranepore.

Before, however, proceeding to describe what took place at the meeting, perhaps it would be as well that our readers should know something of this lady, as she will take a somewhat prominent and important part and place in our story.

Rane Luchme Bhie was a Hindoo widow of high rank. Her husband had been the native ruler or Rajah of a large tract of country, which now formed the division of Ranepore, and where the town of this name was situated.

Rane Luchme Bhie (commonly and familiarly known by the name of the "Bhie Sahiba,") lived in the extensive and thickly populated old native city, about half-a-mile distant from the civil and military station of Ranepore, and enjoyed a large pension from the Honourable East India Company, but bore a character better known for evil than for good, a fact that will be apparent to our readers as we progress with our narrative

Bad, however, as she was, she might have pleaded, and perhaps with truth, the excuse that the treatment she had undergone, in at least some instances, was such as was calculated more to develop the evil that was in her, than the good. For many years her husband, Rajah Gungadhur Row, had lived respected and loved by his subjects, and, in fact, by all who knew him, in his famous old granite-built fort, which reared its solid and massive grey walls in the very middle of the city of Ranepore, fully commanding it, and from its great strength and solidity, was considered almost impregnable.

He had married Luchme Bhie when she was quite a child, and she had only come to live with him a few years before his death. They had no children; a bitter disappointment to the Rajah, who had long hoped for a legitimate heir to his possessions and his "Rajh."

When Gungadhur was drawing near the close of life, and believed that he had not much longer to live, he expressed a wish to see the political officer who had been in the habit of advising him in the conduct of his affairs, and with whom he had formed a genuine and cordial friendship. This gentleman's name was Shakespear, and, on hearing of this desire, on the part of the Rajah, he hastened to Ranepore, and found his old companion and friend longing for his arrival.

Many a pleasant day had these two gentlemen passed together in former years in the jungle tracts and "shikargahs" or game preserves of the Ranepore territory, for they were both keen sportsmen and good "shikares," and so had strong sympathies with each other; the Rajah looking on the political officer as his staunch friend, and Shakespear warmly reciprocating his feeling.

On Shakespear's arrival, late in the day at Ranepore, he found his old friend just approaching the shore of that unknown sea over which it is the destiny of all some day to pass. He was lying on a charpoy or native bed, and was being affectionately fanned by an old and faithful servant, while near him sat a Brahman, of great sanctity, on a black

panther skin, reading over, in a monotonous sing-song tone of voice, charms or incantations in Sanscrit, calculated, it was believed, to keep off the influence of dark or evil spirits from the chief.

At the Rajah's feet lay a faithful old hound, of the short-haired Poligar breed. "Bajo" was his name, and he was a very great favourite with his master, but he also showed signs of age and weakness.

On seeing the European gentleman enter, Gungadhur Row languidly raised himself, with a great effort, on his shrivelled though still sinewy arm, and for a moment his keen dark eye kindled with some of its old fire, as he said: "My Kismat is good, in that I once more am permitted to greet you, sahib. I have not long to remain in this changing world of ours, but I have yet one duty to perform before I go."

Then addressing his servant, Gunnesh, who had been his foster brother, and his religious attendant, the Brahman Balmukind Shastri, he said: "leave me with my friend, and return when I call you."

The Rajah then asked Shakespear to sit down near him, and on his request being complied with, he said: "Sahib, our friendship, as you know, is not of yesterday, and I am about now to confide to you the only wish I have on earth, but before doing so, I must relate shortly to you something of my past life. Pray give me your attention while I do so.

"You know I am the last of my race, being childless. On the death of my father, many years ago, I became Rajah of Ranepore, by right of succession, by the will of God, and the pleasure of the Company Bahadur. I then married my first wife and she bore me three sons but they all died before reaching manhood, and their mother who, I sincerely loved and respected, also passed away shortly after the birth of her last child. When years had gone by, I married again, in hopes of having an heir, but was disappointed; and my second wife was carried off by that deadly disease cholera, and I was doomed to disappointment again.

"In advanced age I took to wife the present Rane Luchme Bhie. I married her against my inclination, and I have never loved her, and she is, as you know, childless. We have no feelings in common, and to you I look for assistance and advice. I am desirous that our adopted son, the lad Burjore, may be officially acknowledged by the Government. He is a distant blood relation, and if I am assured that he will be permitted to succeed me as Rajah, I shall die happy. As you are aware he is only six years old, and on my death some one should be appointed regent until he comes of age; but I do not wish my wife, Luchme Bhie, to be so, as I know her to be an unscrupulous, badly disposed woman, and I have reason even to suspect her fidelity to me as a wife.

"My desire is that the Government should appoint some English officer to the temporary charge of my estates, so that my adopted son, Burjore, when he becomes of age may come into possession of them in the same prosperous state as I hope to leave them in.

"This would not be the case if they were entrusted to the Rane, my wife. Should, however, the Company Bahādur not think right to acknowledge the adoption, I then wish it to be clearly understood that I leave my estate—excepting my personal property, jewels, and such like, which I wish my adopted son to inherit—to the Honourable East India Company Bahādur—may their Rajh continue for ever—and not to my wife, who, I believe, would tyrannize over and ill-treat the people whom I have endeavoured, by God's help, to govern with justice and kindness, and who, I believe, love me well, and will regret my death. You will perhaps think, sahib, this, my last request an unnatural one, for, as you are aware, there have been many instances known of women succeeding to a Rajh in the petty states of Bundlekund, and governing with judgment and success too; but my wife is not one who could be trusted with power.

"I have also other reasons for what I say. I know the 'Sahib Log' do not believe in communications from the un-

seen world with those still in this; but, believe me, when I swear by the holy 'Gunga pani,' that such do take place, and that in my own case they have occurred. For it was only last week that, while sitting in the magic circle in the Temple of Davee with four holy Brahmans, the materialised form of my late father, Rajah Shunkur Shah the just, stood before us, and addressing me, said: 'Oh, my son, it will not be long now, before you leave the troubles and cares of earth life, and join me and your mother in the land of spirits, where we, with your two wives, and your three much-loved boys, now grown into young men, await your coming. Fear not for the future, but believe that the Great Spirit cares alike for all his created beings, be they Hindoos, Mahomedans, or Christians, the lowest caste, 'Chumbar or Dâre,' is as dear to Him as what is called on your earth, the holiest and most immaculate of Brahmans, or the most pious and saintly of Fakirs. As man lives in earth life, so he takes his place in the different spheres of spirit life, progressing, and rising higher and higher, as by the teaching of the bright and good spirits, associated with him, and by repentance for the evil and unloving deeds done by him in the body, he becomes fit for advancement to the endless joys awaiting all, and every one of God's creatures. My son, look not on death but as a door which opens into a new and perfect existence; it is an archway through which the spirit of man passes at the moment of leaving this world for a higher and more sublime and congenial land. There is, really, nothing more painful or repulsive in dying, than there is in passing into quiet, peaceful, and dreamless slumber. Believe not that what is called death is a final termination of human existence, but believe that death causes but as much alteration in the condition of the individual, as the bursting of the rose bud causes in the situation and condition of the flower. Death is, therefore, but an event, only a circumstance in the eternal life and experience of the human soul. The reason of my appearing to you this night, which I have been enabled to do through the magnetic influences and

power of those forming this circle, but more particularly by those of one well known to you; I refer to the upright and good man, Gunput Row, whose hand you now clasp; is to tell you this and to warn you that it is your duty to do all you can to prevent your present wife, Rane Luchme Bhie, succeeding you in the government of Ranepore, because, as she is a bad, ill-disposed woman, it would be to the detriment of the people, so long entrusted to your care and government, that she should rule over them; and it is with a view of preventing such misfortunes that spirits, such as I am, are permitted to revisit this earth, and assume material forms similar to those they formerly held while on earth, as a proof of their identity, and to warn, guide, and advise those they love on earth, to do their duty to their fellow-men and women. My son, I must now leave you. I can stay no longer on this cold earth of yours. God bless you! We shall soon meet in another sphere, never again to part.'

"The form, or apparition, of the Rajah Shunkur Shah, my father, then began to disappear, and gradually vanished from our sight."

CHAPTER III.

SHAKESPEAR heard the words of his friend with considerable astonishment, not unmixed with superstitious fear, for he could not mistake their fervour and earnestness, spoken, as they were, at a time when the Rajah could have no object in deceiving him, and with such truthful confidence in his friendship.

He replied: "My old and valued friend and companion, far be it from me to throw even a shadow of doubt on what you have so confidently related to me. As you have said, we English do not, as a rule, place much credit in supernatural appearances, though it is only known to the Supreme Being, whom I believe to be the God of all nations and to care equally for all those He has created, whether, in some instances, He does or does not even in these days, in His wisdom, permit the spirits of those who have passed the portal of death to revisit this earth. Our Bible, the foundation of the Christian religion is, no doubt, full of such instances, and I can give no good reason why what occurred in olden times should not take place now. However that may be, rest satisfied that whatever I can do to further your wishes shall be done."

A smile of satisfaction lit up the worn and anxious features of the old chief, on receiving this assurance from one he well knew, from past experience, would be as good as his word, and he said: "May the blessing of a dying man rest on you, 'sahib;' and now, for the last time, for I feel my days, and it

may be even my hours, in this world are drawing to a close, let me, for the last time, perform the usual ceremony on parting."

He clapped his hands, and old Gunesh entered. The Rajah told him to bring the "Atr-dān," and then, with his old and feeble hands, proceeded to sprinkle Shakespear with Otto of roses; and presenting him with "Pan-supari," he bid him good-bye in this world for ever.

This was the last interview the political officer ever had with the Rajah of Ranepore, for he was obliged to proceed on business to a distant part of the country, and in the course of a few days he received a "Khareta" from the Rane reporting her husband's death.

Shortly after, however, he returned to Ranepore, and pitched his camp in a shady grove of mango trees, which was well known by the name of "The Joken Bagh," about half-a-mile from the city, and despatched a short report of the death of the Rajah to government, promising more particulars afterwards.

A few days after Shakespear's arrival, having dined, he was sitting in his tent enjoying a cigar before retiring to rest, when his orderly, Chaprasse Hyder, came in and said that a man who objected to say who he was, or to mention his business, was desirous of having an interview with him. Shakespear replied, "Place my revolver on the table near me, and admit him." Hyder left the tent and in a few moments returned, followed by a slight figure of low stature, covered over from head to foot in a native chaddar, or sheet, and then retired.

Shakespear's visitor having made the usual salaam or salutation, by raising the right hand to the head but without uncovering it or the face, stood silent until Hyder had gone away, and then a graceful and symmetrically formed round arm, the wrist of which was ornamented by two massive gold bangles, set with diamonds, was thrust out from under the cloth or choddar, and a small well-shaped hand belonging to

it proceeded to remove the covering from the head and face of the visitor, showing to the expectant political officer the smiling features of a most unmistakably handsome native female.

It was a face which, when once seen, it would be difficult to forget, with jet-black liquid eyes, fringed with long sweeping eyelashes; a forehead giving promise of intelligence and determination; a beautifully chiselled aquiline nose, and a small exquisitely shaped mouth, but one which, if closely observed and studied, would give the idea that its possessor could be cruel and unsparing under circumstances where she was opposed or thwarted.

The lady, for she most undoubtedly was one, was the first to speak, and she said:

"Sahib, do you know me?"

Shakespear replied that he had not that pleasure.

His questioner smiled still more sweetly, and said: "It is exceedingly unlikely, nay, almost impossible, that you should do so, as you have never seen me before, and the circumstances under which you do so now are not, I fear, calculated to make you form a high opinion of me; but let me put an end to doubt, and the curiosity I see clearly depicted in your face, by telling you that I am Rane Luchme Bhie, of Ranepore. And now, sir, having become aware who your most unfortunate visitor is, I ask your attention and forbearance while I inform you why I have disregarded all rules of etiquette, and I fear even put my good name and reputation in peril, by visiting alone, and that too at night, the camp of an English gentleman.

"You are aware that among Hindoos there is little consideration shown to the feelings of a woman in connection with marriage, and that with her parents rests the choice of a husband.

"I was married to Rajah Gungadhur Row when quite a child, and when he was of an age at which he might have been my great grandfather.

"I have, perhaps, no right to complain of this, it is the destiny of more than half the women that are born in Hindostan, and I only refer to it as a circumstance which rendered it but highly improbable that an heir should have been born to the Rajah of Ranepore, an event which, you know, was so eagerly desired and wished for by my late husband, and this, in a great measure, estranged him from me, and caused him to make the request to you a few days before his death, to the effect that I should not succeed him as ruler of Ranepore. You look surprised at my being aware of the nature of this request, as you were alone with him, or thought you were so, when he made it. But this was not so. I had been informed by a Brahman, who had formed one of the magic circle in the Temple of Davee when the spirit of the old Rajah Shunkur Shah is said to have appeared to my husband, what had taken place then, and I took measures to overhear what was said in my husband's conference with you for I was in hiding behind a partition in the wall of the room, made, I have no doubt, many years ago for similar purposes, and I thus know what you pledged yourself to do on that occasion. It is now with the hope of causing you to alter that determination I have ventured here to-night, and risked loss of good name and caste, which would most undoubtedly follow, if my visit became known."

The Rane here paused, and stepping closer to Shakespear, placed her delicately-formed, warm, trembling hand on that of her companion, which was lying on the table before him, and letting her other rest gently on his shoulder, she stooped over him until her breath fanned his cheek, and in broken accents she said:—"Sir, in the name of justice, in remembrance of your mother, your sister, or perhaps of one dearer to you than either, in far-off 'Wilāyt,' renounce your unjust determination to injure a helpless woman, and deprive her of her rights!"

In the position described, she awaited a reply.

Shakespear was but a man—for even political officers are,

after all, but men—and the state of affairs he felt to be both critical and trying; but prolonged silence would, he considered, make matters worse. So, summoning to his aid what little hardness of heart still remained at his disposal, he said:

"Rane Sahiba, the honour you have done me, and I may say also, the pleasure you have given me by this visit, were not anticipated by me, and you can hardly expect me to give you an answer, on so important a subject as the succession to the Ranepore Raj, without first receiving the orders of our rulers. I have no doubt but that you will be justly and fairly treated by our kind and paternal Government, and of this you may rest confident."

Luchme Bhie made no reply, but instead of doing so, she looked straight into Shakespear's eyes, with her own beautiful dark piercing orbs. It was only a look, but we all know that looks sometimes express more than words, and Shakespear read hers as follows:—

You may be a political, familiar with duplicity and well versed in the meaningless phraseology so commonly called into use by those of your class, when it is not convenient to tell the honest truth; but a woman's natural instinct, where her interests are concerned, can see through all that as clearly as a first-class, clear-headed lawyer, would be able to see through the prevaricating evidence of a perjured witness; or a well-informed, intelligent physician would be capable of detecting the incipient symptoms of lurking lunacy in the cunning semblance of an insane patient.

Our political felt, to use a somewhat American expression, "in a fix." His beautiful companion's touch and near proximity sent a thrill of feeling through his whole body, and she was, as it appeared to him, fast gaining a magnetic influence over him, such as an electro-biologist obtains over the will of a person submitting himself or herself to him; but, calling prudence to his aid, he said:

"Dear lady, do not press the request you have made. I see by your look that you think I am deceiving you; but

trust to my word, when I tell you that my sympathies are with you, and that in making my report to Government, I will, as far as my honour and duty will allow of, speak as favourably of your claim as circumstances will admit."

The Rane, still retaining her position, and gently pressing the hand of her companion with that of her own, which was resting on it, said:—"My lasting gratitude will ever be yours for your kind promise of assistance, and I shall ever feel that the risk to my good name which I have this night run, has not been incurred in vain."

After this speech, Shakespear thought—we will not say wished—that the interview would terminate, but an irresistible influence appeared to prevent him from taking any active measure for breaking it off, and, while thinking of doing so, a sudden gust of wind extinguished the solitary lamp, which was burning on the table, and Shakespear and the lady were left in darkness to pursue their conversation, and to cultivate their newly and so strangely-formed acquaintance, which, although we cannot speak positively on the question, we have a strong belief they did, to their mutual satisfaction. As it does not, however, appear requisite that our readers should be admitted more into their confidence than they have already been, and as it does not materially concern our story that they should be so, we will close this chapter and leave them together to enjoy, without interruption, the still and silent hours and refreshing coolness of a tropical night.

CHAPTER IV.

THE morning after the interview above related, Shakespear awoke from a disturbed dream of the Rane, her husband the late Rajah, old Gunnesh, his servant, and his own orderly Chaprasse Hyder, who all appeared to have been taking an active part in sitting on and compressing his chest and carrying him through the air and eventually pushing him over a precipice. From this precipice he appeared to keep on falling to an immeasurable depth, until, apparently having at last reached the bottom with a bump, he awoke with a start and found himself lying on his back on his bed under the 'Shamiana' attached to his tent, and feeling no inclination for a renewal of the night mare, from which he had just awakened, he looked at his watch and found it about an hour from daylight.

His mind at once reverted to the occurrence of the past night, and being no longer inclined to sleep he got up and lighting a candle, stretched himself out on a long-armed easy chair, and commenced having a good think over what had taken place the night before, and forming his plans for the future. As he did so, he felt as it were pulled two different ways. He remembered his promise to the late Rajah, his old and valued friend, regarding his last request, and then his mind reverted to his assurances of the night before, to the Rane. While thinking the matter over, and feeling a little bewildered as to what he should do, and how his official report should be worded, a curious, and in India an ill-omened occurrence, took place. He heard the shrill

cry of the wild partridge coming from a patch of jungle near where his tent was pitched.

This cry or note heard at night, or during the hours of darkness, betokens no good to the hearer of it, and was considered of such evil omen by the "Thuggs," that if a band of them had even proceeded miles on their journey to commit a pre-arranged crime of murder and "Thuggee," they would turn back and put off the enterprise until a more auspicious time. Shakespear knew this, and though he was not of a particularly superstitious turn of mind, it impressed him unpleasantly with anticipations of coming evil. However, shaking off the feeling as well as he could, he called to his Kidmutghar Hassan Beg, to make him a cup of coffee, and solaced himself by lighting his pipe and smoking until a yellow strip of light appeared to line the horizon, giving an unmistakable sign of approaching day; this, as it increased, assumed a purple hue, and shortly after the sun in its golden splendour showed its glittering, dazzling face, and rose rapidly into the sky. It had not risen more than four spears' length in height, when our political, having refreshed himself with his morning bath—which he took by pouring the contents of four or five "Ghurras," or porous earthen jars of cold water over his person, and with the help of his servant, Sookha, having performed his toilet—called for breakfast, which meal he quickly despatched, and then betook himself to his writing table, and after some consideration, commenced the following letter :—

"To the Secretary of Government.

"Sir,—I have the honour now to forward you further particulars regarding the decease of the late Rajah Gungadhur Row, of Ranepore, promised in my former hurried letter on the subject.

"The late chief, shortly before his death, invited me to an interview—he and I were the only persons present—at which he told me that he left his landed estate to the Government should it be considered that"—

Here the writer paused, thinking how he should word the remainder of the statement so as to keep faith with what he had promised the deceased Rajah, and at the same time place the widow's claims in a favourable light before the ruling powers. To do this—his wishes being conflicting, as our readers will probably have observed—required both tact and consideration, so Shakespear laid down his pen for a time and again betook himself to tobacco, in hopes of being inspired by its soothing influences, and proceeded to view matters through the curling smoky circles which from time to time he emitted from his lips and which dissolved and disappeared much in the same way as did the thoughts and resolutions he came to regarding what his communications with Government should be. At last his thoughts began to wander curiously from these points and he found himself asking, "Where the Dickens does the smoke go to? though it disappears from sight, it must be somewhere?" Before, however, he came to any satisfactory opinion on this point his thoughts were called to a subject better worthy his contemplation by the entry into the tent of the Chaprasse Hyder Khan—who, our readers may remember, was the same who ushered in Rane Luchme Bhie to his master's presence the night before. He showed no small degree of excitement, and having made a respectful salaam, said :—"Sahib, the Shikare Unto has just arrived in hot haste from the "Budbukut" jungle, and has brought news that the man-eating tigress you spent so many days in looking for last year, has taken up her place in a hill called the "Kala Phār," and has killed and eaten the old Biragee, "Khaki Bawa," a man of great sanctity and much respected and venerated by all the neighbourhood, and Unto wants to know whether the Sahib Bahādur will not come and avenge poor "Khaki Bawa's" death, and slay that haramzade of a tigress—may her sister be defiled. Unto also says he has assembled a hundred and fifty beaters and is confident that the "Harān Khore" animal cannot escape this time as she

has gorged herself with "Khaki Bawa's" mortal remains, and is sleeping off the effect under a "Sumbala bush," but it is very desirable that the sahib should start at once or the "Budnusheb Janwar" may slip away, as she is as cunning as a "Shitām."

Shakespear, as stated before, was a keen sportsman, and the invitation just suited the mood he was in, and was the more acceptable as it for the time relieved him from his difficulty, so he put off finishing his letter to some future period and prepared himself to take to the jungle side, little thinking that fate had ordained that the letter he had that morning began should never be finished, at any rate by him, and that its not having been so would lead to circumstances but little contemplated or intended.

On his coming out of his tent, he saw standing in front of it Unto, a Gonde or hill man by caste, and a Shikare by profession, and on his right and left stood, a few paces back, his two stalwart sons, chips of the old block, "Puggo" and "Buggo."

Unto had always been a favourite with Shakespear, and was well known and respected as one of the most successful tiger slayers in that part of India. His popularity was also much increased by the fact that he was well known to have much too great a respect for the "Sahib Log" to shoot tigers himself, when any English gentleman of sporting inclinations and propensities was within reach. Unto had heard on the present occasion that Shakespear was one of these, and, indeed, he had had practical experience of this before, so he had hastened to the camp that morning with the information regarding the famous man-eating tigress, which our readers are already in possession of. Unto was a somewhat remarkable figure. He stood six feet four without his shoes—a superfluity he very seldom used. His features were essentially Tartar and expressively Gondé, with high cheek bones, protruding mouth and lips, overhung by a heavy grizzly moustache, large piercing eyes, between which there

stood out prominently a not badly shaped nose, though with a slight inclination to turn upwards.

There was an expression of honesty in his face that could not well be mistaken. On his head he wore a close-fitting leather skull cap. His lithe, spare, wiry form was innocent of covering but that which nature had given him, all except his loins, round which he wore a piece of country-made cloth, of the colour of the surrounding jungle grass and leaves. It had been dyed in a decoction extracted by boiling the bark of the Bhabool tree, and had by this means, and by constant wear and exposure to all weather, become of a faded neutral tint, a colour well calculated to enable Unto to escape observation, and creep up, unseen, through the bushes, and so approach, unobserved, the wild animals of the jungle, against whom it was his delight to wage a constant war. On his shoulder, with the muzzle pointed to the front, lay a long-barrelled "There-made matchlock," fitted with a lighted match, made from the bark of a peculiar shrub found in the jungles, which was twisted into a cord, about the thickness of a little finger, and so fixed in a piece of crooked iron that pressure on the trigger, by the fore-finger, would bring it down on the priming and cause the ignition of the pinch of coarse-grained gunpowder, lying on a spoon-shaped priming pan connected by a small hole with the charge in the barrel of the matchlock, and so cause the discharge of the primitive old-fashioned firearm, which, it may be observed, was generally loaded with so large an amount of gunpowder and variously-shaped pieces of iron and lead—well rammed home,—that frequently on its being fired off, from its recoil, it knocked old Unto backwards, and nearly dislocated his shoulder. This, however, the old Shikare was well accustomed to, and, indeed, it was considered by him as a most important and necessary part of the programme. Round his waist he wore a Samber skin belt, which supported his supply of ammunition. His powder was contained in a crooked ram's horn fixed to this belt, and near it hung a small

leather bag well stocked with iron and leaden bullets of different sizes and shapes; and in the belt, between it and Unto's body, was stuck, handle downwards, a "Kolhare" or small axe, an implement invariably carried by all Gondes—even by women—and in using which they are wonderfully expert, and are said even sometimes, when in large bodies and when firearms are not procurable, to be in the habit of attacking tigers and panthers; and, by their agility and quickness of eye and hand, to kill and destroy these formidable denizens of the jungles, with their Kolhares alone.

The two lads, Puggo and Buggo, who stood by their father's side, were, though young, and far less experienced than their sire, by no means backward in the knowledge of jungle craft. They had been the constant companions of Unto, and had shared in all his perils and adventures ever since they had become old enough to accompany him on his shooting expeditions. Their dress—if such deserves the name—was similar to that of their father. The "Kolhare" was their only weapon, if we except a good thick bamboo or "Lhatti," clamped with a ring of iron by the village blacksmith at each end to prevent splitting, and add to the weight of a blow given with it.

On seeing the political officer Unto and his two sons made low salaams, and stood respectfully waiting his pleasure; and Shakespear addressing them, said: "Well, my old friends, the sight of you on this fine bright morning is cheering, and just what I desire. What do you think of our chances of bagging the tigress, which I hear you have marked down, Unto?"

Unto replied: "When I started to come here all looked favourable, and I had no fear for our success; but an occurrence took place on the road that has thrown some degree of doubt into my mind. Perhaps, though, you, sahib, may not attach so much importance to what happened as we do. It was this: On leaving the jungles where we had marked down the tigress we were proceeding at a brisk pace towards your

camp, when, just as we were passing the place where two roads meet and cross each other, a vile snake, a Cobra, passed quickly in front of us, from left to right, and disappeared in the grass. Now, sahib, you must know that this is one of the most unlucky omens that could have happened. Had the snake gone from right to left it would have been a sign of good fortune; but its having gone from left to right betokens nothing but evil.

"I have, however, I hope, taken means to counteract this influence, for I at once sent Buggo into the nearest village to buy a black cock for four annas, and took it to the shrine of the "Burre dew," which is under the mowha tree some little way off—about a coss from here—and having repeated a munter or charm I had learned from my father, who had the reputation of being somewhat of a Jadughar or enchanter, I cut off the cock's head with one stroke of my "kolhare" and sacrificed it to appease the anger of the Dew, by sprinkling the cock's warm blood over the stone, smeared with red ochre, which is the god's favourite resting place; so you see, sahib, if misfortune should overtake any of us, it will be no fault of mine."

Shakespear smiled at Unto's superstitious fears, but wishing to humour the old Gonde, he said: "You have done well, Unto, and as you are out of pocket by your wish to please me, here are four rupees for you to buy some good English gunpowder with, and if we bag the tigress I will give you five times that sum and a good drachm of brandy to boot, so now let us start so as to be on the ground before the tigress gets over her first sleep, after having devoured poor Khaki Bawa's body, for when she awakes she will most certainly make for water to slake her thirst, and she may not return to the same place again, and so we may miss finding her."

While this conversation was going on the camp became alive with expectation and those who contemplated accompanying their master began to gather round him to receive his orders; these were soon given, and horses were

saddled, guns and rifles brought out, and taken from their covers, and Shakespear's elephant, "Mote Mala," with her shikare howdah securely fixed on her back, was brought up for his inspection by the old grey-headed Mahout, Khuda Bukhs.

Shakespear patted her affectionately on the forehead and placed several balls of "goor" (coarse sugar) into her expectant outstretched trunk, which favourite food she quickly transferred to the cave or cavity doing duty for her mouth. He then mounted his horse, and the party, with Unto and his two sons leading, started off at a good round pace for the tract bearing the ominous name of the "Budbukut" jungles, at which in time having arrived, a halt was called, and Unto was asked to arrange a programme of procedure.

He sent his two sons, and others selected from among the most intelligent of the beaters, to occupy the tops of high trees commanding a view of the several paths and tracks leading from the lair of the tigress, so that should she take alarm and attempt to sneak away, her movements would be known and followed up. Then addressing Shakespear, he said :— "As we know exactly where the shitām of a tigress is, it would be best in the opinion of your humble slave, if instead of beating her up, that you, sahib, should advance on your elephant, and try and get a shot at her as she is lying down sleeping, and so settle the business at once ; so if you will allow me, I will take the place behind you in the "khawas" of the howdah, generally occupied by your orderly, Chaprasse, and then I shall be able to direct the Mahout to the exact spot where the tigress lies. It is close to the rock, under the shade of which that holy man Khaki Bawa used to live, and you can see the top of it cropping up out of the bamboos and grass, with a large mowha tree about a hundred yards from it ; so if Khuda Bukhs will keep Mote Mala's head straight in line with the tree, and move quickly, but noiselessly, we shall soon see what is written in our "nasib."

Unto's advice was taken, and the services of beaters were for the time dispensed with, and they not unwillingly betook themselves to the top of a small hill in the vicinity, where they could see what took place in safety and be available should they be required.

CHAPTER V.

SHAKESPEAR, mounted on Mote Mala, began to approach the spot pointed out by Unto, who occupied the "khawas."

The sagacious animal moved almost without noise, taking care even to avoid putting her feet on any of the dry leaves or broken branches, which lay abundantly in her path, and as they neared the lair of the tigress, a keen look-out was kept up, and eager eyes scrutinised and looked under each bush and tuft of grass as the party now slowly progressed forward. At last Unto whispered to Shakespear, "Sahib, stop the elephant, and look in the direction I point with my finger," suiting the action to his words. "Do you not see her lying under the shelving bank, quietly knocking off the flies with her paws as they settle round her mouth and whiskers? She is not yet aware of our approach, but I don't think we can get nearer her without alarming her; and as she is not more than fifty or sixty yards off, I advise you, sahib, to take a steady pot shot from where you are at her."

Shakespear being of a like opinion with Unto, he caused the elephant to be stopped by touching the Mahout twice on the head, a sign which had been pre-arranged for this purpose, so as to avoid speaking as much as possible, and so running a chance of alarming the tigress, and then stooping down and looking in the direction pointed out by Unto, he saw clearly the head and striped fore-part of the tigress lying down at her ease, apparently perfectly unaware of any danger. Whispering to the Mahout to keep the elephant steady, and

bringing the sight of his rifle to bear just behind the shoulder-blade of the tigress, Shakespear pulled the trigger. His hand was steady and his eye true, but, unfortunately, just at this moment something or other—perhaps a fly or insect —disturbed or tickled Mote Mala, and caused her to move, very slightly indeed, but just enough to interfere with the flight of the bullet, which, instead of finding its billet in the heart of the animal for which it was intended, struck her in the centre of the body and she at once recognised the fact that she had to do battle for her life. Before the smoke had cleared off from the muzzle of the discharged barrel of Shakspear's rifle, so that he could see the effect of his shot, and repeat it if necessary with his second barrel, the tigress had sprung round and was rushing towards the elephant with a loud angry roar.

Mote Mala was staunch and fearless, and stood like a rock, and Shakespear, waiting for a clear sight of his active enemy as she came like lightning through the bushes, did not deliver his second shot until she was but twelve or fifteen paces from him. He then fired, but owing to the quickness with which the tigress came on, he missed the chest at which he had aimed, and his second bullet entered the body of the tigress in close proximity to the first one, and in an instant more she had landed on the elephant's head and had seized poor Khuda Bukhs by the thigh. Shakespear, snatching up his second gun, placed the barrel of it close to the animal's head and pulled the trigger, but what with the shaking of the elephant, now become unsteady, and his fear of injuring the Mahout, he again failed to strike a vital place, and the tigress fell off, dragging down the old Mahout with her, and then having somewhat recovered herself, she gave him a last parting crunch, and disappeared among the bushes without giving Shakespear another shot. The latter, though feeling almost sick with excitment, clambered over the front part of the howdah, and placed himself on Mote Mala's neck, from which place the Mahout had been torn down, and first having

quieted her, he caused her to sit down, and being assisted by Unto—for there was no other person near—he proceeded to bind up the injuries of the wounded man with his handkerchief so as to stop the bleeding, and having to some extent succeeded in doing so he sent Unto for help, and a charpoy having been procured from a neighbouring village, Khuda Bukhs was placed on it, and removed out of the jungle, and despatched on the shoulders of four strong willing bearers to Ranepore for medical treatment.

The undignified defeat sustained by the party, and the untoward misfortune to the Mahout, was most provoking and humiliating; but neither Shakespear nor Unto felt inclined to give up the contest. As it would have been dangerous, and indeed cruel, to have called on the beaters—now the tigress was wounded—to enter the jungle, and beat her up, they were told to return to their former position on the hill; and Mote Mala having had a bath and a good drink in a pool of water in the vicinity, Shakespear and Unto again mounted her, the "Charkut" or grass cutter, "Budree," having taken the place of her Mahout, and they thus again advanced into the jungle to look for the wounded tigress and, if possible, finish the work so unfortunate in its commencement.

They searched carefully every bush and looked closely into every thicket, until quite tired out, and were just leaving the jungle in despair when, close behind them, there was a sudden rushing noise among the bushes and their formidable enemy the tigress, with a roar and a spring, landed, this time on the hinder part of the elephant, and buried her sharp penetrating claws deep in Mote Mala's flesh. This proved too much for the elephant, good and staunch as she was, and she set off at her best pace through the jungle, unmindful of all impediments, and in her terror became quite unmanageable, paying but little heed to the frantic endeavours of her driver to stop her, though he struck his iron "ankos," or driving hook deep into her forehead, vainly trying to arrest her flight. They had not gone far when the protruding branch of a large

mango tree came in contact with the howdah, and it, and its occupants, as well as the tigress, were swept off the elephant's back, falling together on the ground in a confused mass of *debris*. Shakespear, struck by a branch, lay insensible; the driver, Budree, also stunned and unable to move, lay close to him, and Unto was the only one of the party, though paralyzed for the moment, who escaped unhurt.

On looking up from where he lay on his back on the ground, he saw the tigress standing a few paces from him—fortunately for him—looking over him, at the retreating form of the elephant, who, now riderless and howdahless, was disappearing among the bushes. Unto did not move, for well he knew that if he did so, it would at once attract the tigress's attention to him, so he remained perfectly still, keeping his eyes half closed, anxiously watching the movements of his enemy, who, having satisfied herself of the discomfiture and retreat of her foe, Mote Mala, began to look about her, and appeared to be considering what her own next movements should be.

To Unto's experienced though half-closed eyes, she showed evident signs of distress, for the exertions she had undergone in the late struggle had caused a free flow of blood from her wounds, and weakness was slowly though surely creeping over her. At last, to Unto's great relief and satisfaction, she turned slowly round, without observing him or his companion who lay quite at her mercy, and walked or rather staggered towards a small pool of water covered with a coat of rust-coloured slimy substance evidently showing the vicinity of iron in the soil through which the water had oozed. Having reached this pool, which was about thirty or forty yards from where she stood, she presented a side view of herself to Unto, as she bent down her head and neck to drink. Unto having taken a good look at his enemy's profile, began to peer cautiously round him, knowing that as long as she was engaged in slaking her thirst she was not likely to observe his movements, particularly at the distance she was now from

him. To his infinite delight he saw lying within arm's reach one of Shakespear's double-barrelled undischarged rifles. He whispered to himself, "If I can only get hold of this I shall feel something like myself again;" so keeping his eye fixed on the tigress, as she continued eagerly to lap up the water and quench the burning thirst, caused by her wounds and loss of blood, he slowly and stealthily stretched out his arm and drew the rifle towards him. Then, cocking both barrels so as to give himself a second shot, if his first should not prove deadly, he moved himself slowly round on his left side, and, leaning on his elbow, he raised the rifle deliberately, and resting it on a broken piece of the howdah, that happened to be lying in a direct line between him and his object, he brought its fine sights to bear just where the head of the tigress joined her neck, and muttering a prayer to the 'Burre Dew' for help, he gently and steadily pressed the trigger. The heavy conical bullet this time flew true and straight to its destination, and the famous and much dreaded man-eating tigress fell dead almost without a groan or quiver.

Unto felt somewhat like James Fitz-James, when, as described by Sir Walter Scott, after escaping impending death, from the uplifted dagger of Roderick Dhu, he

"Faltered thanks to heaven for life,
Redeemed unhoped from desperate strife."

And addressing his now lifeless foe he said: "Ah! daughter of a doubly-defiled mother. Ah! cursed animal; slayer and devourer of the just and holy man, 'Khaki Bawa.' Your time has at last come, and he has been avenged, and that too by the humble and unpretending hand of the Gonde, Unto, son of Buddo. Ah! daughter of perdition, look at the mischief you have caused." This last he said as he turned round to where Shakespear and the Charkut Budree were lying apparently dead among the *debris* of the broken howdah. "I fear," continued Unto, the tears coming into his eyes, "that the kindest and best sahib it has ever been my good fortune to serve has by your misdeeds been sent to the land of spirits before his

time. I dreaded some dire misfortune when that unlucky snake crossed our path this morning, and it is evident the sacrifice I made to avoid it was of no avail. Had I sacrificed a he goat instead of a paltry cock I have no doubt but that the Dew would have heard me and would not have permitted this to happen."

Unto then placed Shakespear in a sitting position propped up by the branch of a tree, and proceeded to sprinkle his face with water, brought in Shakespear's own hunting hat from the pool where the dead body of the tigress (now no longer formidable) lay, just as she had dropped to Unto's bullet. After a time he was greatly relieved and rejoiced by seeing signs of life and consciousness return to his master.

Poor Budree also received attention and soon sat up and looked about him, though at first in a bewildered manner. He, however, was not much hurt, and was quickly on his legs again and off in search of the truant Mote Mala.

Unto's two sons, with Shakespear's servants and Chaprasse quickly after joined them. Having watched with deep attention and interest the occurrences we have related from their elevated position, they now came as fast as they could to aid their master. An impromptu palanquin was formed with a charpoy procured from a village near, and Shakespear, in a semi-conscious state, was carried home to his tent, where medical attendance had with some difficulty and delay been obtained from a small military station some miles distant, and where there happened to be a medical officer, who, on his arrival, pronounced Shakespear to be suffering from a complication of sunstroke and concussion of the brain. After a month's suffering, during which time he hovered between life and death, he left India for his native country on sick leave, having been relieved by an officer of the name of Plowden in his official capacity as political officer in charge of Ranepore.

On taking over his predecessor's office—which Plowden did without coming to Ranepore—he was called upon to fur-

nish a report regarding a successor to the late rajah, and in looking over the different documents left by Shakespear, hoping they would throw some light on the subject, the unfinished letter we have already placed before our readers, written on the morning Shakespear met with the unfortunate accident which had placed him *hors de combat* and rendered him incapable of carrying on his official duties, was found among his papers. This document, as will be remembered, stated that in an interview with Shakespear the late rajah had named the Government as his heir, but left off abruptly without expressing fully the wishes of the chief, and it was taken for granted by Plowden that these wishes only referred to some unimportant affair. In forwarding Shakespear's unfinished letter to the Government, therefore, he stated that from its tenor, it was evidently the desire of Gungadhur Row that his lands should lapse to the State, and that Shakespear's departure and ill-health rendered it impossible to communicate with him on the subject, and ascertain in detail any further particulars of the interview with the deceased chief, which, he thought, even if ascertained, would probably prove unimportant in their nature, and might well stand over for after consideration. Under these circumstances he recommended that the estate should be annexed at once and become British territory, so that arrangements for its care and well doing might be made without delay. After some time—for delay in such matters was the rule and not the exception—this proposal was duly sanctioned, and a proclamation annexing Ranepore in the usual verbose and lengthy style of language was issued; and shortly after the officers with whom this narrative has to do were appointed to rule over the estate and lands of the late chief, Gungadhur Row, and a military cantonment was also formed and garrisoned as above described.

On the Rane becoming aware of what had occurred, she lost no time in remonstrating and claiming the Ranepore Rajh, either for herself or for Burjore the adopted son

of the late chief. She asserted that the boy, Burjore, was the lawful and proper heir to the Ghaddee, and pointed out in connection with her own claim, there were no lack of precedents in Bundlekund establishing the fact that succession to landed estates had been permitted and sanctioned in the female line. This point, however, she did not press, but stated her willingness that Burjore should be acknowledged as Chief of Ranepore, while she desired she might be permitted to govern for him, until he became of age.

Most probably had the old chief died without expressing any wishes as to his succession, either his wife, the Rane Luchme Bhie, or his adopted son, would have succeeded him; but under the circumstances mentioned in Shakespear's unfortunate, half-finished letter—which, had it been completed would, most probably, have put the ruling powers in possession of the real wishes of the deceased chief regarding the succession of his adopted son—the claims of the Rane were rejected as being contrary to the last will of her deceased husband. She, however, did not permit the matter to sleep, but even employed counsel to plead her cause in England, and thus expended much of the money which was given her by the State as a provision for her own personal use and that of Burjore in doing so, but without any successful results, and she, at last, was obliged to desist. There remained and rankled in her breast, however, a deep feeling of discontent and hatred to those whom she considered had defrauded her of her rights, and, though outwardly assuming an appearance of acquiescence in her fate, her constant thoughts and wishes were for some opportunity of avenging herself, and throwing off fealty and subjection to the British rule.

CHAPTER VI.

WE have now made our readers aware of what sort of a person Rane Luchme Bhie really was, who, on the afternoon of the day on which our story opens, (to hide her real intentions,) had invited the principal officials at Ranepore to hold a conference, in connection with measures to be taken regarding the evidently increasingly disturbed state of affairs in the surrounding country.

Though the Rane was in no way an acknowledged ruler, yet Colonel McLeod, the Commissioner of the Division, and next to him in importance, Major Shalto Gordon, well knew that her influence was great, either for good or for evil, and they had, consequently, come to a decision that they could not do better than meet what might be possibly her friendly overtures, with, at least, an appearance of confidence and trust; and it is to be remembered that at the time of which we write, all India was in a blaze, or fast becoming so, and the wave of rebellion and mutiny was gradually gathering strength, and rolling on far and wide, from its starting point, the ancient capital of the Mogul, the once famous City of Delhi.

The hour fixed by invitation for the proposed conference—to which we have referred—was 4 p.m., and the place of meeting the Palace of the Rane, which was situated in the middle of the city of Ranepore, and was a building of some size and importance, possessing no small degree of architectural elegance and beauty. It had, since the death of Gungadhur Row, the late rajah, been selected as the residence of his

widow, being considered a more convenient place of abode than the old-fashioned and all but impregnable fort, under the walls of which it stood, and with which it was said to be connected by a hidden and cunningly contrived subterraneous passage.

On the present occasion, in the largest of its rooms, arrangements for holding the coming Durbar had been made, and a richly coloured hand-woven Delhi carpet was carefully spread out and covered the somewhat rough stone floor; while chairs of various quaint shapes and colours, many of which bore the marks of great antiquity, mixed with others of more modern origin and form, were placed in formal rows, and stood ready for the reception of the expected visitors. One side, or rather the end of the room was walled off by a large richly-embroidered "purda" or curtain, behind which the Rane herself intended taking her seat, and, unseen to the eye, communicate with her expected guests. For, though a Hindoo by caste, she, as was customary with most women holding a similar position with her in life, affected to be a "Purdanasheen," or one whose person, but more especially whose face could not, without a breach of the laws of decorum, be exposed to public view.

This custom, though especially binding only on Mahomedan women, was one which, with many others of a like nature, had been also adopted largely by Hindoo females, and particularly by ladies of the higher classes. And, though Rane Luchme Bhie—as the reader is aware—did not hesitate, when it suited her convenience, to expose her charms when she paid her nightly visit to Shakespear's tent, with a view of enlisting his sympathies on her side, on the present occasion considered it expedient to adopt the more dignified position of a "Purdanasheen." Before, however, describing what took place at the meeting or Durbar, it would be as well that the reader should know something of what was going on behind the scenes, among the immediate and personal followers of the Rane.

Under the flooring of the palace there existed a low subterranean vaulted chamber about twenty-five feet square, into which there were two entries, one leading into a narrow winding staircase running up into the palace, with an entrance into the Rane's private rooms, and the other with a similar opening leading underground for a long way, and affording exit outside the walls of the city, into the rooms surrounding a large "bowlie," or built-up well constructed for the convenience of bathers, and also to afford shelter to travellers or others who might require it, in its dark though cool archways and recesses. The door leading from the well into the passage, was formed of iron bars or grating, and offered the public a view through it into a small square room, the sacred resting place of a stone-cut image of the goddess 'Bhawani,' which stood in all its hideous ugliness besmeared with red lead and lubricated with oil and ghee, while also decorated with threaded necklaces of pretty little sweet smelling Chambeli flowers, which in their simplicity contrasted strangely with the grim and ghastly expression of the goddess's features. This image served to hide the entrance from 'Chandare Bowlie,' into the passage leading to the rooms before described, and its existence was known but to a few trusted followers of the Rane, who herself kept the key of it, and it was in this room that (since her husband's death) Luchme Bhie had been in the habit of holding secret meetings with those of her late husband's dissatisfied subjects and others who hoped to subvert the British Government, as by this arrangement, their connection with the Rane could be kept secret, she coming to the meetings from her own room in the palace, and those she wished to see being admitted secretly through the door in the passage leading from the Bowlie, and being dismissed in the same way.

These meetings were generally held at midnight, but on the day we have at present to do with, namely, that of the Durbar and proposed conference—held at the request of the Rane—an assemblage had taken place in the forenoon to

decide the important matter as to what action should be taken at the Durbar, and we shall now endeavour to acquaint our readers with what occurred at that assemblage. As mentioned before, the room itself was by no means a large one, and having no window or opening by which daylight could find an entrance, it had been lighted up with oil lamps, placed here and there in niches, cut in the wall for this purpose, and these threw a dim uncertain light on the bare time-stained, stone-built, arched roof, and gave a weird aspect to the assembly of conspirators, as they sat in dusky groups on the floor or reclined on the carpets and cushions placed here and there for their convenience.

At one end of the room Rane Luchme Bhie sat on a charpoy, or native bed, the frame-work of which was constructed of hand-wrought ivory, prettily carved. It was covered partly by a richly embroidered cloth of crimson and gold, which contrasted very unsuitably with the uncouth furniture and surroundings, all of which were of the commonest description. The lady was evidently at her ease, and enjoying the occasion, as also the fragrant aroma of the mixture presented to her by her attendant, in an elegantly-shaped small hand huqua, which she smoked apparently with no small degree of complacency and satisfaction. Her dress, though that of a woman, was not the ordinary costume generally worn by females of her class and position in life. On her head she had a small cap of bright-coloured scarlet silk, with a string of pearls and rubies encircling and laced into it, and round her neck a diamond necklace sparkled, of not less value than a lac of rupees at least. Her bodice, freely opened in front, showed a well-shaped voluptuous bust, and terminated at the waist, which was somewhat tightly drawn in by a belt worked over and embroidered with gold, and in it were ostentatiously stuck two elaborately-carved, silver-mounted pistols, of Damascus make, together with a small but elegantly shaped "pashe kubs," or hand dagger, the point of which, it was whispered, had been dipped in a subtle poison,

whereby a wound, however slight, must prove fatal. Instead of the usual cloth, or petticoat, she wore a pair of loose trousers, from which protruded two small, prettily rounded, bare feet, which rested on a cushion placed in front of her. On her finger she wore her late husband's signet ring. We have already described Luchme Bhie in our narrative of her interview with Shakespear, shortly after her husband's death, as an unmistakably handsome woman, and the period of time which had passed since that interview, had in no way detracted from, or diminished her charms, though it had, from vexation and anxiety, perhaps somewhat hardened or increased the cruel expression of the mouth, which has been already alluded to as attaching itself to it, and which would lead an attentive physiognomist to form an opinion that she would be hard and unsparing if thwarted or opposed in her wishes and desires.

With the exception of her one female attendant, Gunga, who stood respectfully with folded arms behind her mistress, the Rane was the only woman in the room. Next to Luchme Bhie in rank—though not in influence and importance—was her father, Nana Gunput Row. As far as outward appearances went, he showed but few signs of intelligence. He had, however, a very strong affection for his daughter, and would have sacrificed his life in her cause. Next to Nana sat Shewdasho Row—a distant relation of the late rajah, Gungadhur Row—whose grievance was, in the first place, that his claim to succeed to the Chieftainship of Ranepore on the decease of Gungadhur Row had been put aside or overlooked; and next, that the pension which had been granted to him had been reduced from 300 rupees a month to half that sum. There were also present the powerful proprietors of important estates situated in the late chief's territories; they were known by the names of their estates much in the same way as in the Highlands of Scotland a landlord is called after his ancestral lands. They were holders at a barleycorn rent of these lands, and went by the names of "Jigne,"

Oodgowan," and "Nowneer." Then came Bolanath, a staunch follower and adherent of the Rane and said by some even to aspire to her hand.

There was also present Fyzally Ressaldar of the Cavalry Regiment stationed at Ranepore, commanded—as the reader is aware—by Major Colville, and Laltabade, Hanildar-Major of the Infantry Regiment, who prided himself—and justly so too—on being the tallest and best made man in the native army and, perhaps, the strongest also; at any rate he had never been beaten in wrestling or any of the feats of strength for which the native soldiers of India are so justly famous. There was also Chato, the agent of a native chief, the petty Rajah of Shaghar, who, though not prepared to take an active part himself, had sent "Chato" to represent him. Lastly, though not least in importance, was Tantia Topee, agent of the famous Nana Dhundo Punt, of Bitore near Cawnpore, who had just arrived in disguise as a Biragee or religious mendicant from Cawnpore, where rebellion and discontent were fast festering into a crisis, that resulted, before many weeks had passed, in an event that has taken a place in history, time will never efface. Nana had not as yet publicly assumed the name of "The Peshwar," but among his intimate friends and followers he made no secret of his intention to do so, when matters were ripe for it.

Tantia Topee—afterwards so famous as having by his adroitness and generalship supported the cause of his master when all others had deserted him, and having harassed and worn out our tired troops in pursuing him from one end of India to the other until at last, betrayed by his friend Rajah Man Sing, he expiated his crimes on the gallows—was an ill-formed, loutish-looking man, but possessing a figure spare and wiry in appearance, with cunning, shifty, though determined looking eyes—eyes which either could not, or would not look you honestly in the face for more than a second at a time. Though Tantia was a Baniah or grain seller by caste and trade, he had worked himself up by his abilities and perse-

verance to the position of confidential agent and adviser of the Nana of Bitore (the descendant and representative of the once powerful Peshwar) who took so prominent a part in the events with which this story has to do.

On being called to the front by the Rane, Tantia salaamed with both hands to the ground and produced from his waist-band of cloth a carefully folded parcel from which he took forth a "Khareta" or native letter of ceremony from his master to the Rane Luchme Bhie, and humbly kneeling down presented it to her, saying: "My Master and Lord, the Maharajah the Peshwar Nana Dhundo Punt Bahādur sends this by the hand of his slave to the chaste and virtuous Rane Luchme Bhie, who will soon be Queen of Bundlekund, and desires his slave to say that, with every wish for the welfare of this august lady, the nourisher of the poor and refuge of the destitute, he desires most earnestly to know how she is and whether her health is good? He also wishes his slave to say that the tyrannous and detested Kaffir dogs will all, before long, be sent to the Jahanum to which they were destined, even before they were born. The Maharajah also advises his illustrious friend to follow the example set by him, and endeavour to gain over the hearts of the Sepahees of the regiment stationed at Ranepore, in the way he has won over those at Cawnpore, so that when the proper time comes, the cursed 'Faringees' will be, like the 'Dhobee's' dog, belonging neither to the House nor to the Ghat, and so being without friends, they can be put to death without inconvenience to any one."

Having delivered this message Tantia stood before the Rane with his arms crossed over his breast and looked humbly on the ground awaiting an answer.

Luchme Bhie cut the twisted silken cord with which the embroidered cloth cover of the Khareta was bound with her dagger and opening it proceeded to inspect the contents, but on finding the letter written in Persian, she handed it over to her follower and secretary Bolanath to read. It proved, how-

ever, to be only a formal complimentary letter enquiring in the usual set terms after the Rane's health, and in no way alluding to the state of affairs then existing in India, for the wily Maharatta was much too cunning to run the risk of committing himself in writing against the powerful British Government, until it should be quite clear that the day for doing so had arrived, and that the feelings of the native army were ripe for mutiny and rebellion; for he thought there was no knowing what accident might happen to his letter in transit, or into whose hands it might fall; and, indeed, he could not be quite certain what views the Rane herself might hold. So, with the innate cunning of the Maharatta, he preferred feeling his way by writing a formal complimentary letter, meaning simply nothing, and sending his message by word of mouth, which could easily be ignored if necessary, to committing himself in writing. That message given by Tantia Topee, the Nana's confidential agent, the reader has already heard.

When Bolanath had finished reading out aloud the Khareta, the Rane said: "I am only too glad to rank your honoured master among my friends. I am but a woman, but I have right on my side, and the Brahmans—whom I have well paid and consulted freely—tell me my star foretells good fortune and is in the ascendant. As yet, however, we must be cautious, for the Faringee Sahibs are still strong, and though the hearts of their once faithful Sepahees are fast turning away from them, yet there are many still among these, who from their boyhood have eaten the salt of 'Jan Kumpany Bahādur,' (whom I believe to be an old woman residing in a place called Leadenhall Street, London, in far on Wilāyt,') who will not hear of turning against their rulers, as they say by doing so they will become 'Namak-harāms,' or unfaithful to their salt and will, consequently, be doomed to 'Dozakh,' or the place of torment, where all such are said to go. My friend, Tantia, do you know the old proverb? 'There are four things that cannot be brought back:—1st., a

word spoken; 2nd., an arrow discharged; 3rd., a Divine decree; and 4th., past time.' A man of your intelligence will easily see how this applies to the present time. My friends Fyzally, Ressaldar, and Laltabade, the Hanildar-Major, who have, at the risk of their lives, honoured us by their presence at this meeting, assure me that when the time comes their influence, which is not little with the men of their regiments, will bring them over to our side and will decide the wavering and confirm the doubtful; but they advise caution, and that we should cajole, flatter, and beguile the Sahibs with promises. How say you, Ressaldar Sahib, have I not expressed your opinion truthfully?"

Fyzally, on being called upon, rose and displayed to the assembly a well put together though somewhat bulky fat frame, with unmistakably Mahomedan cut features, strongly approaching the Jewish, and which showed the marks of hard living and a too great indulgence in many of the vices to which most men of his class—(Fyzally was an Affghan)—are addicted.

He had entered the Irregular Cavalry as a young man, and had left his home in Kabul on account of a blood feud, having stabbed his opponent at the very door of the Musjud where they had met to perform their religious duties, and had, to avoid certain death, deserted his native country. Fortune, however, favoured him, and we now find him in the much envied position of Ressaldar of his regiment.

Fyzally naturally had great influence with his commanding officer, who always consulted him, and implicitly trusted him in matters connected with the discipline and well-doing of the regiment, and was even frequently guided by his opinions in recommending to head quarters men for promotion in the different grades and ranks of it.

One would have thought it would naturally have been the interest of such a man to remain faithful and loyal to his colours. Under ordinary circumstances this would have been the case but such was the feeling and belief which had

crept over the minds of nearly all natives of India, whether soldiers or civilians, that the last days of the British Government had arrived and that Hindostan was to revert to the descendant of its ancient native rulers, the old Kings of Delhi, that even those who wished it otherwise and would much have preferred remaining as they were, considered it but simply a matter of fate and destiny that they must, however unwillingly, transfer their allegiance to the new ruler.

The 'Ahwa,' or whisper of destiny, had gone forth and it was imperative to obey—and such was the case with Fyzally, who was now called upon by the Rane to express his opinion at the assembly we have described.

He spoke as follows—(addressing himself to the Rane)—"Most gracious lady, what you have been pleased to say is as true as that the sun shines in Hindostan. It is the decree of God, and has been foretold by our prophet (glory be to his name) that the reign of infidels will shortly come to an end, and that then the people will belong to God, the country to the king, and the two religions will govern all. Your slave has attended this meeting at a great risk to himself, for as yet power has not been taken from our masters, and should Colville Sahib become aware that I have come here he would shoot me with his own hand as soon as he would a snipe, if no other method of taking my life was open to him. Though a Kaffir and an unbeliever he is, doubtless, a brave and stern man, and the greatest caution is required in dealing with him. I must also confess that he is—for an infidel—a just and, to some extent, a good man, but God's decree must be fulfilled. It is his Kismat and he must die with the others when the time comes, though I would like to spare him if such could be done with safety, but this cannot be.

"The Adjutant Burgess Sahib, though quite a boy, is very determined, and if not carefully dealt with he will give us trouble, for both he and the Major Sahib have many attached friends in the regiment whom it might be difficult to persuade to rise against them, so we must work on their feelings and I am

spreading reports through those I can trust in the regiment that the 'Sirkar' have an intention of interfering with our religion, and that ground bones have been mixed with all the flour sold by the Baniahs, so that the Hindoos may be thus put out of caste by eating it, and that pig's fat has been smeared over the cartridges we are obliged to bite before using, and so Mahomedans will be defiled. No Mahomedan or Hindoo, if they can be brought to believe this, will hesitate to join the good cause with heart and hand; but time is required for all this, and I would recommend that at the 'Durbar,' to-day, the greatest courtesy be shown to the Sahib Log, and that they be lulled into confidence by promises, that if even all the rest of Hindostan go against them, we, their faithful followers, are prepared to die for them and will remain true to our salt. This they will most readily believe, as most of them think, God only knows why, that they are really beloved by the natives of this country and do not understand or know that there can never be any real amalgamation of feeling between black and white.

"I have given my opinion, and with your permission, most charitable and chaste lady, will now sit down, and perhaps you will call on some other person to speak; for instance, my friend Laltabade, the Hanildar-Major of the Infantry Regiment, is one who can give good advice in the matter before the assembly."

CHAPTER VII.

THE Rane beckoned to the individual mentioned by Fyzally, and he respectfully arose and addressed the meeting as follows:—

"Oh! brothers and most virtuous sister, Rane Luchme Bhie, protector of the destitute, I am but a poor Brahman, and quite unworthy to speak in this august assembly, but what little I know that will I say truthfully before 'Bhagwan,' who knows all things.

"I am, though poor, a Brahman of pure descent; my mother was one of the holy women devoted to the service of the Temple of Luchme, at Benares after which, respected lady, you are, I imagine, named and my father was a Pujare of the same Temple. I never quite knew what matrimonial ceremonies were gone through between my respected parents, but if even these were in any degree imperfect in form, the fact of their being servants of the Temple and Shrine of the Goddess Luchme would absolve them from all blame that ill-disposed people might be inclined to attribute to them. They are both dead, and are now enjoying the reward of their faithful and devoted services and the upright chaste life they led on this earth. I mention this because some low caste people in my regiment, who are jealous of my position in it, have been so impertinent as to say that I am of base origin and no Brahman at all, and that my father was a 'Faringee Sahib,' and my mother a common 'Natch girl.' May the graves of such spreaders of calumny be defiled.

"Now having, I hope, satisfied all present as to my descent and caste, I will go on to what I consider right and advisable

in the present state of affairs. My commanding officer, Colonel Partridge, is, I most confidently assert on the word of a Brahman, an old fool, for he believes implicitly in me. Some days ago he called a meeting of the native commissioned and non-commissioned officers of the regiment and told them that he had heard that there was some degree of dissatisfaction existing amongst them and the men of the regiment regarding the use of greased cartridges, as it was said in the Bazaars, by some ill-disposed persons, that they were smeared over with pig's and cow's fat, so as to injure the caste and religion of both Hindoos and Mussulmen, because, before using these cartridges they were obliged to bite off the ends. Partridge Ṣahib said this was not true and that no such substance had been put on the cartridges but that if any one doubted this, or objected to biting off the paper ends of the cartridges, he would take it on himself so far to deviate from regulations as to permit the ends to be twisted off with the fingers instead of being bitten off.

"On hearing this most of the officers approved of what the Colonel had said, and agreed that this arrangement would be quite satisfactory, and at once remove all doubt from the minds of the Sepahees.

"After all had spoken to the above effect, as I remained silent I was asked my opinion and I said that if I even incurred the risk of being thought disrespectful I must speak the truth and be faithful to my salt, and that I could not concur in the plan proposed, for it did not, in my opinion, become a great 'Sirkar,' like 'John Company Bahādur,' to eat its own words, the regulations were, that the cartridges were to be bitten before using them and this order should be enforced.

"I said this because I felt the Colonel's plan, if adopted, would lead the men to feel satisfied that there was nothing really wrong with the cartridges, and even if there was, that their caste would be safe if they used the precaution proposed.

"I then produced a bundle of cartridges which I had

brought with me, and taking them up one after another, I bit the ends off each in the way we are obliged to do before loading and said: 'See how little belief I have in the reports invented by evil persons.'

"On my doing this the Colonel and European officers appeared to think very highly of me, and praised my loyalty and zeal, and so the meeting broke up.

"I, however, shortly after the Sahibs had gone, called another meeting in the lines of the regiment and told all present that it was perfectly true that the cartridges were smeared over in the way described but that I had been obliged to do as they had seen me do from fear of the Colonel, who had, I said, called me in private to his house and having confessed that the objectionable fat had really been put over the cartridges, had ordered me, on pain of death, to bite a number of them before the native commissioned and non-commissioned officers to deceive them, so that they might lose caste and eventually become Christians. I also said that, though I had been obliged to bite the cartridges, I had substituted others without fat on them for the greased ones, and had thus, apparently, been able to comply with the orders of the Colonel, and also save losing caste.

"I need hardly tell you, my friends, that in truth there was nothing wrong with the substituted cartridges which I bit. Had there been, God forbid that I should have risked the chance of defiling myself by even touching them with my mouth.

"I have a plan to propose which I think will be of great use in exciting and throwing doubt into the minds of the agricultural class of the population, and if, Rane Sahiba, you think my proposal a good one, perhaps you will give orders to have it carried out. It is as follows:—

"Directions should be given to a village watchman—the Kutwar of some important town or large village in the neighbourhood of this city, to make seven Chapatees of wheaten flour, or perhaps it would be better that in the first

place some one should make these cakes and give them to the 'Kutwar,' and tell him to take a single Chapatee to seven different villages, and deliver them to the Kutwars of these villages, and tell them that it is the Sirkar's orders that the head man of the village shall feed the village dogs with the Chapatees sent to their villages, and that they shall make seven other Chapatees, or cause them to be made, and in like manner that the Kutwars shall take one of each of these seven cakes to seven other different villages, giving similar instructions to the different watchmen and 'Malgozars,' or head men of these villages, such as they had themselves received in the first instance.

"In this way Chapatees will be distributed all over the country, and their spread will be, in the minds of the people, emblematical of the spread of the two religions, and the Chapatees given to the dogs will represent the fact that the religion of the infidels will come to an end, and be dishonoured and destroyed. Even if this is not quite understood in this way by all the people, it will, at any rate, serve to cause excitement and disorder in their minds. This plot has also the advantage of being one the 'Sahib Log' will not understand or be able to prevent or punish any one for, as, indeed, it will be impossible to discover how the spread of the Chapatees originated.

"If my proposal is approved of I have no doubt but that Bolanath will be able to make arrangements to start off the first batch of Chapatees in a very short time, should you, Rane Sahiba, direct him to do so. An auspicious and fortunate day should be selected for this and it would be advantageous if that good man, Balmukind Shastri, who was the confidential friend and adviser of the late Rajah Gungadhur Row, of happy memory, would interest himself in the matter and would bless the Chapatees before they are sent off, and perform a Puja to Bhawani, so that good fortune may follow our efforts to maintain our religion and caste, and prevent our being forcibly made Christians, which is evidently the intention of the Sirkar. Who can doubt this?

"I think it right before I sit down to mention that there are several Budmashes in my regiment who, notwithstanding all I can do, will not, I fear, be tempted to join against the Sahibs. The chief among these are Jemidar Rustom, Havildar Bawane Pursed, and Nargue Rumgiah; but they never will be able to stand up against the numbers we shall be in a position to bring of well disposed persons who are prepared to join the good cause.

"With your permission I will now sit down, and, perhaps, some other person more worthy of being heard will address the assembly."

Balmukind Shastri asked permission to speak, and this having been accorded, he said—

"My revered mistress, you are aware how much I was attached to the late ruler of this State, my lord and master, and that I was entirely in his confidence. I have heard with sorrow what has been said at this meeting, and also the suggestion regarding my taking the part proposed by Hanildar Laltabade, that I should perform a religious ceremony to expedite and assist the progress of the distribution of Chapatees, so as to disturb the minds of the people; and I must now, even at the risk of incurring your censure and displeasure, protest against this proposal altogether and decline having anything to do with it. If my dear old master had been living I know he would have been the last person to form plans against the ruling powers and consequently I think it my duty to you, his widow, to warn you that even should you at first be successful, and overthrow the authority of the Government, it could only be for a time, for the power and resources of the Sirkar Angraze are vast, and all those who oppose it must eventually get the worst of it, and be ruined. I would rather counsel you to go heart and hand with the English and endeavour to prevent rebellion and discontent. I fear my saying what I now do will displease you greatly, but I have the satisfaction of knowing that I have advised you wisely and that had the late chief, your

husband, been now living, he would never have lent ear to those, who, from a mistaken belief that the Sirkar wish to interfere with their religion and caste, prompt you to rebellion and ultimate destruction, which must follow. I ask, why should the British Government wish to take away our caste? It has always protected the religious rights of every sect of its subjects and there is no reason for supposing that it will in any way change its conduct in the future. Be advised by your old faithful servant and have nothing to say to treachery, bloodshed, and murder.

"Is it not on record in our Shāsters that it is against the religion of the Brahman to take away life? and yet you are advised to join in the destruction of thousands of God's created beings! Be assured that none of those who take life will enter into the blessed Nirvana."

The speaker was regarded by the assembly of conspirators with frowning looks and angry dissenting gestures, for most of them felt that Balmukind was right, and what he had stated was really true, and they feared that his influence as an old servant of the State and the family so lately connected with it, was so great that his advice might be followed and then hopes of a harvest, from plunder, bloodshed and murder —which they so ardently wished for—might after all be snatched from their grasp.

Had they, however, felt confident of what the real feelings of the Rane were, they would have had but little dread of this. She at once foresaw what might take place and hastened to obliterate, as far as she could, the effects of Balmukind's advice. Addressing the conspirators as follows, she said:—"Brothers and friends, if time allowed of it I should have liked much to have heard the opinions of more of you, than I have been able to do this day, but our time is short, the Durbar commences at four o'clock, and there is but an hour left us until that time when I am pledged to meet the Commissioner and other Sahibs; but, before we part, I must express clearly my intentions and views, so that there may be

no doubt in the minds of any. I hope, for the sake of the old 'Rajh,' and the respect my late husband was always held in by great and small, that you will hear me with patience, and remember that though a Rane—now, alas! only in name—I am after all but a helpless widow woman and deserve your kindest consideration, forbearance, sympathy, and support. Most of you are aware of the continued oppression and injustice with which the late rulers of Ranepore have been treated, but for the information of those who are ignorant on this subject I shall state shortly what these grievances are.

"When my late husband, Gungadhur Row, died some years ago, I was deprived of the right of succession which you all know was mine, and I was offered a pension of 50,00 rupees a year. This paltry sum I refused to accept at first but necessity at last forced me most unwillingly to do so. I also received ten lacs of rupees worth of property, which had belonged to my husband, but it was easy for the Sirkar to give me this, for had it not seized all the revenue and wealth of the State which was properly and by justice either mine or belonged to our adopted son the poor boy, Burjore? I have done my best to obtain restitution and spent large sums of money in paying an English advocate to plead my cause in 'Wilāyt,' but my money has been thrown away and I have been treated with harshness and injustice. Do you think a native Rajh would have ignored my rights and that of the lawfully adopted son of my husband, Gungadhur Row, in that way? No! You all know this could never have occurred under our ancient rulers the Kings of Delhi!

"Most of you—or at any rate many—must be aware that the unholy proceeding of slaughtering cows, in and near this city, was prohibited from the time of its formation thousands of years ago, but that this horrible and irreligious custom was in the Christian year 1854 introduced and encouraged by our rulers, to gratify their own selfish appetites for the flesh of animals. You know that I joined with the inhabitants in a petition begging that this detestable practice—so

abhorrent to our religious feelings—might cease, but that a decision was given against us though the matter went before the head of the Government. We were helpless and had but to submit, but I would now ask Balmukind Shastri—who has told you that by rising against our present rulers we are infringing the principles of our religion by 'causing the death of thousands of God's created beings,'—whether the sacrilegious slaughter of the holy cow is to be for an instant tolerated, even if hundreds of thousands of hated Faringees should have to be put to death to prevent it?

"You are also aware that the Sirkar, under pretence of taking measures for the better sanitary condition of this city, has invaded the privacy of our houses, swept away our old and long cherished receptacles for rubbish and dirt, and brought both high and low, the Brahman and the Dāre, under one law, forcing them into unholy contact with each other, and that our petition against this was also of no avail. You know also to your cost how you were made to pay for all these whims and fancied improvements; and, as everyone is aware, three-fourths of the money realised from the poor working inhabitants of this city as a tax remained in the hands of the chaprasses who collected it, and whom we also had to feed, shelter, and even bribe while they were employed in making this hateful collection; and though this was brought to the notice of the 'Sahibs' in hundreds of petitions, no redress was given, and plunder and oppression continued under their very eyes. There are but few of you who have not heard that the Temple of Luchme, situated in Ranepore, had for generations been supported by the rulers of this province from the coffers of the State, and that at the succession to the 'Rajh' of Gungadhur Row he made over the revenue of the villages of 'Kocha' and 'Gowher' for its use and support, and notwithstanding that Major Gordon Sahib, the district officer, recommended—on the death of the Rajah—that this arrangement should continue, it was decided by the Sirkar that this should not be, but that a

paltry sum of money—not amounting to one-half the revenue of the villages—should be paid to the Temple instead, and that the villages I have mentioned should be taken possession of and resumed, and thus our old ancestral rights should be taken away most arbitrarily and unjustly from us; you also know how my petition on the subject was treated. I need hardly tell you of the injustice committed by the Sirkar in ordering the revenues of the flourishing and valuable village of Sameria, which had formerly been expended for the repairs of a tomb of a mistress of the late ruler's father, to be made over to two dancing girls, Motee and Nowrutter, instead of to me, the widow of Gungadhur Row. I could relate many other like acts of oppression but they are too numerous for me to mention."

Then turning to the discontented chiefs of Oodgowa, Nowneer and Jigne, she said :—"You, my friends and adherents of my late husband, have but too good cause for complaint, for have not your ancient rights been interfered with and curtailed? For ages you have held your estates and lands at a mere nominal rent, having only been obliged—when called on—to render loyal service to the State in men and arms Now, on the excuse that no such service is required, these rights have been ignored and obliterated and you have been made to pay your quota to swell the ill-gotten wealth accumulated in the Treasuries of the deceitful Faringees; but for you the opportunities will shortly come, when you will be able to free yourselves from their yoke. To you, I say, keep your hearts stout and strong and your swords sharp, and be ready to join the good cause with your brave followers when the signal is given, which will stir Hindostan from one end to the other, from the snow-capped Hymalayan mountains where are said to dwell the priests and prophets of a holy, universal brotherhood of mankind to the remote and most southern point of India, terminating in the vast and unknown ocean.

"My friends, have you not heard that a whole regiment

of Sepahees have been blown away from guns at Calcutta because they refused to become Christians and if such was the treatment they received, what may we expect ?"

This fiery, and to some extent, eloquent declamation of the Rane's, delivered as it was with great earnestness and gestures suitable to the occasion, entirely obliterated the doubts Balmukind's words might have engendered in the minds of some of the assembly. Luchme Bhie, with the quick perception of a clever woman, at once saw this and added :—"Friends, you have all heard the advice given by 'The Shastri,' and far be it from me to say that he is not a wise and holy man well versed in Hindoo religion, but his is but the voice of one and by nature he is a man of peace and averse to strife of any sort. He is also, I have little doubt, strongly attached to me and my son, Burjore—who you know should be Rajah of Ranepore—but I fear old age and infirmities connected with it have somewhat weakened the poor man's judgment and rendered him incapable of grappling with such serious matters as we are now called on to consider, and he is consequently unable to advise wisely in affairs of such moment. And now I hesitate no longer to say that from what I have heard and seen to-day there can be little doubt but that we all—except 'The Shastri'—are of one mind and can trust each other and, moreover, though 'The Shastri' differs from us in opinion, I am convinced he would never be untrue to his salt, nor would he betray our confidence to the detested Faringees. Such being the case, it now only remains for me to give the signal for breaking up the assembly after, however, the usual ceremony of taking an oath to secrecy on the 'Gunga Pani' and the Korān has been gone through."

This having been done the Rane said :—"I now direct that the assembly be broken up as the hour for the Durbar with the Sahibs is near."

The Rane remained until the oath had been taken by all, she herself joining in it, and then, rising, she beckoned

Bolanath to follow her and, accompanied by her female servant, she retired through the passage we have described leading into her palace. The other conspirators also departed, leaving the assembly room by the passage leading to the Bowlie outside the city walls.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON reaching her own room Luchme Bhie turned to her confidential agent, Bolanath, who had followed her, and having first dismissed her female attendant. she said—

"Bolanath, you could not help seeing how nearly what Bolmukind Shastri said in the assembly went to injure the good cause in which we are all so much interested, and that it created a doubt in the minds of my followers and adherents. Had I known he would have expressed such opinions I would never have admitted him, or permitted him to speak in it.

"I am sorry for the old man; but I fear he must be put out of the way, as he may do much harm, and might even think it his duty to communicate with the Sahibs and warn them of what is impending. You know the old proverb, Bolanath—'No fear should deter us from doing good'—so I leave the matter in your hands with the greatest confidence. I will only add, my much trusted friend and follower, that perhaps you might be able to arrange that a 'Nāg Samp,' or Cobra, or any other deadly snake may by mere accident creep into his bed and sting him; or, if you prefer it, and find any difficulty regarding the snake, a little poison mixed with the good man's morning repast of dhal, rice, and milk, might answer the purpose just as well; but death by snake-bite I think is preferable because being a natural and every-day occurrence in Ranepore, little or no enquiry would be made. It must also be taken into consideration, particularly when so good a man is concerned, that to be sent out of earth-life by so holy an animal as the 'Nāg' has its ad-

vantages and will create little notice, whereas, if poison were resorted to, the suspicions of the Doctor Sahib might give us some trouble if he took it into his stupid old head to apply a test to the poor 'Shastri's' internal parts and should he find out that he had, even through sheer accident, been poisoned. Therefore, Bolanath, if you employ poison—and I leave it all to you—let it be, for your own sake my friend, that which is only known to native Hukēms and is of so subtle a nature as to defy all the Angraze doctors' most cunning tests. You will have no difficulty about this; for it is not the first time you have found it necessary to use it, and Bolanath, pray remember that you serve a generous mistress —(she here presented him with a heavy gold bangle)—but also one who, if deceived or betrayed in any way, knows how to revenge herself. Now go, Bolanath, and remember 'speech is silver, but silence is gold.'"

Bolanath made no reply, but felt, villain as he was, creeping feeling of abhorrence combined with fear pass over him; he, however, salaamed respectfully, and was retiring, when the Rane said:

"See that Tantia Topee, the agent of 'The Nana' is well cared for and spare no expense in making him comfortable. He had better, for the present, keep concealed in the rooms of the Bowlee where he can have all he requires without exciting suspicion; and tell him I will see him at a private interview before he returns to his master at Cawnpore."

The conference between the Rane and her follower and servant then terminated.

While what we have related was taking place the preparations for the Durbar had been going on, and all was now ready for the reception of the European officers and gentlemen of the station, in the room set apart in the palace for this purpose and described in a former chapter. The Rane had taken her seat behind the Purda mentioned, and her principal followers and native gentlemen of rank, residents of Ranepore, who had been invited had also arrived and had taken up

their positions on chairs about the room and now waited in expectation of the arrival of the Europeans. At the door of the palace a carpet, extending into the street, had been spread, and on it a band of dusky-coloured musicians—if we may be permitted to call them such—were seated cross-legged in two rows, leaving, however, a space or lane between them through which the expected visitors were to pass before entering the palace. The chief ambition of these musical performers appeared to be to cause an unceasing and, at any rate to English ears, a most deafening, discordant, and somewhat irritating loud drumming noise on their tom-toms or native drums, interrupted occasionally by way of interlude by an unearthly screeching note from the shrill Calara horn of one of the party, whose privilege and special duty it was to perform a solo on this impressive native instrument.

The above, intended as a welcome to the coming guests was, as far as the performers were concerned, carried out with a degree of energy and exertion worthy of more agreeable results.

The street leading to the palace gate was lined by a body of Native Cavalry, between the ranks of which the European gentlemen were to pass. In good time they arrived with Colonel McLeod, the Commissioner, leading, and having dismounted and handed over their horses to the care of their grooms, they prepared to enter the palace. On this the old guns of the fort, which had not been used for many a long day, rang out their welcome in a salute of honour, the musicians doubled their noisy drumming, and the procession, led by two "Chobdars"—or Gold Sticks, in waiting—entered the palace, and each member of it took a seat according to rank and position, the seat of honour, in the centre, being occupied by Colonel McLeod—the others taking up positions on chairs on his right and left. Accompanying these Europeans were the leading native officers of the Cavalry and Infantry Regiments of the station. Among those prominently conspicuous, in the striking and gorgeous costume of a

Ressaldar of Irregular Cavalry, sat "Fyzally," with whose views in connection with impending events our readers have already become acquainted.

The Durbar commenced by Bolanath coming forward from the Purda behind which the Rane sat and intimating to Colonel McLeod that his mistress was present, and though custom and etiquette would not permit of her showing herself before so mixed and numerous an assembly yet she was desirous of conversing with her guests from behind the Purda, which she would do; and on this Colonel McLeod addressed her as follows:—

"Rane Sahiba, before entering on the subject which has been the cause of our presence here to-day, I ask, on the part of the gentlemen here and myself, whether we have the happy fortune of finding you in good health?"

Perhaps, to readers not familiar with eastern custom and etiquette, this speech on the part of Colonel McLeod may appear somewhat unnecessary and even childish. To those experienced in such matters, however, the omission of a formal enquiry regarding health on ceremonious occasions of the nature we are describing, would be considered as neglect or ignorance of good manners, amounting, if intentional, even to insult.

After a brief silence Luchme Bhie replied:—"Oh! protector of the poor, your humble servant, by God's blessing, is able to say that her health is of the best, and she most earnestly begs to be informed of the health of the Rustum of the age, the nourisher of the destitute, and the other Sahibs Bahādur, who have this day honoured her humble dwelling with their presence."

To this the Commissioner made a suitable reply, that all were well, and then commenced the real business of the meeting by addressing the Rane and her followers to this effect:—

"All here present must be aware that an evil wind has swept and is still blowing over the plains of Hindostan, that 'Budmashee' holds its head on high, and that evil spirits

have taken possession of many hitherto good and well-disposed persons, who are now showing discontent and unbelief, and are doubting the motives and intentions of our masters, The Honourable East India Company Bahādur. And I am given to understand that it has entered into the minds of many, and taken root there too, that the 'Sirkar' intend even to interfere in the religion of its subjects, and forcibly turn them into Christians; but the friends I am now addressing are, I feel covinced, too well aware of the real feelings and wishes of the Sirkar to believe this invention of 'Shitām'—the father of lies—even for a moment.

"From the days of Hastings Sahib until now has it not been the constant custom and practice of our rulers to protect and preserve the religious creeds, rites, and ceremonies of all their numerous subjects, from the highest Brahman to the lowest Chumbar and despised Dāre, and no single instance has ever happened that could lead to a contrary belief. I challenge a contradiction to this and I ask why should The Honourable Company Bahādur now change its just and paternal character?

"I fear those who are spreading discontent are but spoilt children, and they must be treated as such, and be severely punished for their ingratitude to their just and but too indulgent masters. It has also reached my ears that reports have been spread abroad that even the cartridges, with the help of which our loyal Sepahees have so often fought against the enemies of their kind and considerate rulers—and, consequently, their enemies also—have been mentioned as a means by which caste is to be destroyed or injured. By an intelligent and far-seeing assembly of educated persons, such as I have now the pleasure of addressing, it is hardly possible a report such as this can be credited for an instant, but among the ignorant it may do much harm. Therefore, my friends, I take this opportunity of asking you to use your influence with such, and to point out the folly and wickedness of believing such inventions of the evil disposed, fabricated by

them in hopes of causing rebellion and bloodshed, so as to find an opportunity of enriching themselves at the cost of the industrious and well disposed. I speak with confidence to you Rane Sahiba, for was not your lamented husband one of the staunchest and most reliable supporters of Government, and were not the very cannon we have just heard ringing out a welcome in honour of our visit to you this day presented to him by the Sirkar as a reward for his loyalty in the last rebellion in Bundlekund, which he took so prominent a part in suppressing.

"I have heard that you consider the boy, Burjore, not having succeeded to the Ranepore Rajh, as an act of the Government with which you have cause to be dissatisfied, but I trust you will remember that it was the desire of your late husband that the Sirkar should take possession of the lands of Ranepore, and provide for you and him liberally—and has not this been done? And now as the representative of the Government I call on you to assist us with heart and hand in keeping down discontent and rebellion, and I do not hesitate to say that those who now take a decided and loyal part will not look in vain for a liberal return when the time comes for taking their services into consideration.

"It is also well that you should know that large reinforcements of troops have been asked for and have been despatched from 'Wilāyt,' and will soon arrive in Hindostan. I do not wish to imply by this that we have any doubts of the loyalty and love of our native soldiers, I only mention the fact as it is well it should be made public. It would be but a poor return to our Hindostani troops to allow even a breath of suspicion to pass over their loyalty and attachment to their rulers and faithfulness to their salt, for have they not fought side by side with the Gora soldiers in all parts of the world—in Affghanistan, in the Punjab, in Egypt, and in China, and have even crossed bayonets with the chivalrous soldiers of France now nearly one hundred years ago—led by the officers they loved to follow.

"No, my friends, we have no doubt of their fealty, and we English have always found confidence is the companion of success; at the same time it is but wise to let even our friends see our strength, not to mention our enemies, if indeed, we have any such—worth notice—in our Indian Empire.

"I may also tell you that the army we lately sent to Persia, under the brave Outram Sahib Bahādur, having accomplished what it was sent for—the overthrow of the forces opposed to it by the Shah of Persia—is now on its way back to Bombay, and will be available for service on its arrival there.

"Friends! we are not wanting in loyal, powerful, independent native Princes and rulers as our allies and well-wishers, among whom may be mentioned His Highness the Nizam of Hydrabad, who rules over so large a number of Mahomedans, and represents their views in Central India, Maharajah Sindia of Gwalior, Holkor of Indore, and many other allies less powerful, but no less loyal chiefs and rulers.

"I have, I think, said all that is necessary on this occasion, and would like to hear, Rane Sahiba, what you think best should be done? for I know you have many wise and experienced servants and adherents of your late highly-esteemed husband who give you their confidence, and who are well acquainted with the feelings of the people."

The reader will probably perceive that Colonel McLeod's speech was one well-suited to the mixed heterogeneous assembly to which it was addressed, as it was intended to show that though he wished to conciliate and attach all hearing it to the cause of law and order, yet, at the same time, he gave it clearly to be understood that the Government were prepared to suppress, with a strong hand, any attempt at rebellion or show of disloyalty that might arise. This, his long and varied experience of the people among whom his lot had fallen as a ruler led him to know was—in such circumstances as he was placed—the only hopeful or dignified way of acting; for Colonel McLeod was well aware how deeply fixed the

belief existed that the termination of the period of British rule in India was approaching—being counted even by days—in the minds of the larger proportion of the people, and that, most likely before help from England could reach the shores of India, a desperate death struggle between black and white, the conquered and the conquerors—which would cause blood to flow as water—was unavoidable. Yet still there remained to him the hope that by showing a bold front until such help did arrive, they might render the struggle, at any rate one in which there would be some degree more of equality of strength than at the time he was now dealing with.

For, though he was not aware how deeply implicated the Rane Luchme Bhie was and how bitter were her feelings, yet he had good reasons for thinking that she was one very likely to be carried away by the hope of redressing by force what she considered a wrong, and it was well known how energetically and determinedly she had opposed the annexation of Ranepore, and had expended large sums of money in endeavouring to obtain a reversal of that decision. And Colonel McLeod thought that if he could induce her to side with the Government, her influence might greatly assist him in postponing—until help came—the rising in Bundlekund, which to his experienced eye appeared almost inevitable.

On the termination of the Commissioner's speech, the Rane replied in a clear distinct voice, which was audible to all:—

"Oh, Rustum of the age and protector of the poor, I, your humble slave, feel the great honour you and the other Sahibs do me, in not only visiting my palace but consulting me on the affairs of the province. What little knowledge I possess I put most freely and willingly at your disposal. What you state, Sahib, that there are troublesome times coming, if they have not now come, is evident to even the humble capacity of her who has the honour of addressing you.

"The rulers of Ranepore have always been loyal to the British Rajh, and though alas, now, through misfortune over

which they have had no control, deprived of power, the few who remain are still well-wishers of the Sirkar Jan Kumpany Bahadoor. We do not believe the reports sent abroad by the evil disposed, that the destruction of our religion and the desecration of our places of worship is aimed at; for we well know that no such diabolical design could enter into the minds of our generous hearted rulers. Sahib! all I have—both money and influence—are at your disposal without reservation and should rebellion break out which God forbid though at present it looks very probable, we are all ready to shed the last drop of blood in so good a cause as that of loyalty and faithfulness to our salt. I feel confident I express the feelings and sentiments of all here present; but I think it would be well that the poor and ill-informed classes of the population should have convincing proof of the attachment and good feeling which exists between the Sahibs and the relations and followers of the late ruler, my lamented husband; and I consequently take it upon myself to invite all the gentlemen, both civil and military, of Ranepore to partake of a feast three days hence, on Friday. The formal invitation shall be sent, and I hope accepted; so by this means the good feeling which exists will be as clear to all, as that the sun gives light and warmth."

Colonel McLeod made a suitable reply, and said that he had no doubt but that all would willingly accept the hospitality so kindly offered.

The meeting then broke up after the usual ceremony of distributing Pān and annointing with "Atr" had been gone through by the Rane herself, who said that though she could not show her face, being "Purdanasheen," yet this did not apply to her hands and arms, which she did not hesitate to stretch out from behind the curtain which concealed her person, and present each of her guests, as they advanced in turn with a packet of "Pān supari," and then splash him over with otto of roses, from a "gulab pash," or bottle for holding that scent.

CHAPTER IX.

WE must now once more ask our readers to accompany us into the private chambers of the Rane, to which she had returned after the Durbar, accompanied by her female attendant, Gunga Bhie. The Rane was sitting, and had been so for some time, apparently in deep thought, enjoying the soothing effects of her carefully prepared Huqua, the fragrant aroma of which spread through and permeated the atmosphere of the apartment. At last she appeared to have made up her mind on the subject she had been considering and an evil smile passed over her handsome features as she said to Gunga "Go and find Bolanath Teware and send him to me; you need not return yourself until I send for you."

Gunga left the room and proceeded to obey the orders given her but as she got outside the door into the passage she muttered to herself—"So it has come to this has it? that I am not to be trusted, and the Bhie Sahiba has secrets which are to be communicated to Bolanath which I am not to hear. We shall see whether after all I have done and suffered for her and after having so faithfully kept her secrets, even when she so far forgot herself as to visit Shakespear Sahib,. and that too at night in his tent, and so put her good name entirely at my disposal; we shall see whether she is to treat me with such scant confidence, and at the same time trust her secrets to that sleek oily faced hypocritical fellow, Bolanath Teware. However, in the meantime, I must carry out her orders and go and find him and I have little

doubt but that will be in or near the 'Madad Khana', where the best and strongest intoxicating drugs are sold."

In her surmise Gunga was right, and having given Bolanath her mistress's message and seen him enter the palace, she followed without being observed by him; and when he had entered the Rane's room, where she sat expecting him, Gunga ran up quickly and noiselessly and placed her ear to the door so as to hear if possible what passed, and this the sequel will show she succeeded in doing and that it led most unexpectedly to results little anticipated by her at the time but with which the reader shall be made acquainted in due course as our narrative proceeds.

Bolanath entered his mistress's presence with his usual stealthy, noiseless, panther-like step, and having salaamed respectfully, stood with folded arms and downcast eyes, awaiting any communication she might think right to make to him.

The Rane broke silence by saying: "Perhaps Bolanath, you may think my invitation to the Sahibs to-day, to partake of a feast in the palace, a somewhat unnecessary and useless proceeding, calculated only to give trouble and annoyance to those who have to superintend and prepare it, but when you hear my reasons for doing so, it is possible you will be of a very different opinion?"

Bolanath lowered his head, closed and again opened his eyes as a mark of respect, but remained silent, and the Rane continued:

"Has it never struck you that much trouble and risk might be avoided if all the Sahibs and their belongings could be got rid of, and sent to Jahanum at once? Very likely, Bolanath, this has never crossed your mind, crafty and cunning as you are—which, as you know, has caused you to be called by the nick-name of 'Lokeria' or the Fox, among those who know you well—you have not been able to form any safe plan by which this desirable arrangement might be effected with any degree of success; but such a plan has

occurred to me, and as you will be chiefly the instrument to carry it out, I will tell you what it is, and how I came to form it."

Bolanath felt things were getting serious, but he remained silent, and the Rane continued:

"Three nights ago as I was lying in this very room on my bed, longing for sleep to come and relieve me—at least for a time—from the weight of care and anxiety, the lot of all mortals but more especially mine and which has of late so oppressed me, I fell into what appeared to me to be a half-waking, half-sleeping sort of dream or trance, and though my eyes were closed, or, at any rate nearly so, I could discern and see all that was going on. The room suddenly appeared illuminated with a dim, misty light, and particularly so that part of it next to the secret door leading to the subterranean passage, which connects this room with that in which we hold our private assemblies. After a time this light appeared to condense itself into one spot, and gradually assumed the outline and form of a human being, at first very indistinctly, but by degrees it developed into the resemblance of a woman who to my great terror advanced slowly or rather glided to the side of my bed, and standing over me, looked down on me. Though almost senseless from fear I recognised the features and form of my deceased and much lamented mother, Bitchea Bhie, who you may have heard, was suspected of causing the death of my father by poison and was forced by her kinsfolk, in order to prove her innocence, or perhaps as a punishment for her guilt, to sacrifice herself on the funeral pile of her husband, and commit the holy right of Suttee, for she thus died and was consumed with her husband's head resting on her lap.

"As she gazed down on me with her cold glassy eyes, an indescribable feeling of superstitious terror crept over me. I tried to awake and rouse myself, but found I could neither move hand nor foot. At last, however, with great effort of will, I found power enough to articulate the words: 'If you

are the spirit of my deceased parent speak to me and say why you have come, and what you want?'"

"The phantom replied: 'My daughter I am your unfortunate mother, and I have a message for you, which I have been permitted to come to this earth to give you. It is that you have been selected as an instrument of fate, by which the wrongs of so many long-suffering people are to be avenged on the hateful and detested race who tyrannise over them.

"'You, my daughter, must, with this object, invite all the Europeans to a feast. The English are so fond of good living that they are not likely to decline your invitation, and you must then so contrive, that deadly poison shall be mixed with the food you give them in such a way as that all shall partake of it, and by this means you will fulfil your destiny, and rid the earth of the wretched unbelievers who deserve to cumber it no longer, for the cup of their wickedness is full to the brim, and even to running over.'

"The apparition then ceased speaking, and after a time began to vanish slowly from my sight, and I awoke as it were from a terrible dream, if indeed it was such, and by degrees regained the use of my faculties and my physical powers.

"Now Bolanath I have sent for you, as I can confidently trust to you to carry out my plans in this important matter; for I need hardly tell you that I have fully made up my mind not to neglect a message from so sacred a source as that which I have just described to you."

On hearing this, Bolanath did not appear to relish much the active part it was evident his mistress intended he should take in so hazardous an experiment as attempting to poison the English community of Ranepore. Not that he had any scruples of conscience or objections on the score of right or wrong, but he well knew the result of failure and discovery would be ruin and death to him. So he began to excuse himself on the plea of his unfitness for a matter of this sort, saying:—"My dear mistress, I hardly see how I can take an active part in what you propose, however desirable it may be,

because if I am known to be in any way connected with the providing or cooking food for the Sahibs it will at once cause suspicion, and they will be put on their guard, and the end will be discovery and ruin not only to me, but also to you, as I am known far and wide to be your faithful servant and follower, and thus all our plans for the future will fall to the ground. Do you not think, honoured and respected mistress, that under these circumstances some other more fitting person, such as the head cook, who will be employed in preparing the food, would be a better and more fitting agent through which to administer the poison?"

The Rane at once saw what was passing in her follower's mind, and met his objection by saying:—"Bolanath you should first hear my plans fully before you object to them. I wish to trust no one in this affair but yourself, in fact the secret will be known only to you and me."

She then got up and went to a small black wood cabinet, which stood in a corner of the room, and touched a spring which caused a secret drawer to fly out. From this she took a small paper packet, carefully folded and tied up, and placed it on the table before her, saying:—"This, Bolanath, contains Sumble Kar. I always keep a small supply of it available, and have, as you are aware, often found it useful. But what I propose is that you should take an active part in superintending and seeing that everything for the coming feast is of the best procurable. You must employ cooks who have been in the service of the Sahibs. These are generally Christians by caste, or rather no caste at all, and are of dissolute and drunken habits, and, consequently, if well supplied with spirits, they are not likely to be very watchful or suspicious, though remember you must not let them have enough to render them unfit to perform their duties as cooks, but only just enough to make them a little muzzy.

"You are aware Bolanath that the most important dish among the Sahibs—of which all partake—is curry and rice, and that this is always introduced at the close of their dinner,

when the wine they all so freely partake of has had its effects, and they are less likely to discover anything unusual in the flavour or taste of their food.

"Well, Bolanath, what you are to do is to watch the rice boiling and, when unobserved by any one, quickly slip the contents of this packet into the pot. You know Sumble Kar is white in colour like rice and almost tasteless, so that it will never be observed. I am given to understand that all the Sahibs eat curry and rice, so every one of them will partake of the poison, and none will remain to trouble us any longer. Do you quite understand now, Bolanath Teware, and don't you think my plan an admirable one, with little risk; for the secret will be known but to us two, and we know how to keep such secrets, don't we?"

Bolanath saw that it would never do for him to show any hesitation—whatever his real feelings were—so he replied:—"Your slave has but one duty, and that is to obey; his life as well as all he possesses is at the disposal of his kind mistress. The plan you propose does certainly appear one in which there is no very great fear or risk of discovery—and should it be so, it would be easy to make it appear that the cook is the guilty person, and you may depend on my doing my utmost to carry out your wishes."

The Rane then replaced the packet in the cabinet drawer and closing it said:—"You know my friend now where to find this when it is wanted; in the mean time the safest place is to let it remain where it is until required. Before you go however, Bolanath, come and look attentively at this little carved head of the god, Hunemān, on the cabinet. You see it is placed amongst numerous other similar carvings of a like sort, and you must remember that the drawer can only be opened by pushing it in thus." She suited the action to the word, and on pressing the small projecting head of the monkey god, out flew the drawer as it had done before.

Bolanath attentively observed how this was accomplished, and on looking into the drawer he saw a small square-shaped

silver box, curiously carved, lying in a corner. The Rane seeing his attention drawn to it said:—"That too Bolanath has its uses. What do you think is contained in that little box?"

Bolanath suggested that perhaps it contained diamonds, precious stones, charms, or such like, which his mistress valued very much.

The Rane replied with a smile:—"No, Bolanath, you would never guess even if I gave you a whole year to do so. Have you never heard it whispered that the point of my 'Pashe Kubs' or hand dagger, is dipped in poison? I see by the expression of your eyes that you have. Well, what would you say if I told you that this box contains enough deadly poison to charge with certain death the points of a hundred daggers? Such is really the case my valued and trusted friend. In it is stored the never-failing poison extracted from the fangs of some dozen 'Kraits' (a snake, the poison of which is said to be more deadly than that of the Cobra), and but half-a-drop would be enough to kill the strongest man or woman in existence. A slight scratch with the point of a dagger which has been dipped in it would cause death in a very short time; and, Bolanath, just feel with your finger how sharp the point of my dagger is." This she said, unsheathing her dagger, and holding it with the point towards Bolanath: "Oh, do not look alarmed, for, my trusted follower, I should never think of scratching you with it, at any rate as long as you remain the faithful and reliable friend I have every reason to believe you to be; I cannot, however, answer for what I should do if I found the slightest deceit or treachery was being practised towards me. But that you know as far as you are concerned is quite impossible, so I shall not dwell on so disagreeable a subject as it is not a pleasant one to converse on." As she said this she sheathed her dagger and placed it in her belt, where she always wore it.

"You now know where to find the arsenic without my assistance, and indeed, perhaps, it would be best that you should

help yourself to it without aid from me, so that I can say truthfully—and you know how I respect and venerate the truth Bolanath !—that I never helped you in any way and you will be able to substantiate what I say.

"Now good bye, Bolanath. God bless and protect you, and remember to keep your own counsel and recollect the old proverb which says : 'sometimes words wound more than swords.'"

Bolanath left the room making a humble salaam, and as he returned home communed with himself somewhat to the following effect :—

"The she devil ! She makes my hair stand on end. I do believe she would murder me if it suited her designs and interests as soon as she would kill a Parriah dog. Even a touch from her dagger would be certain death. I often suspected the report to be true that it was poisoned, and now I know it to be so. She evidently thought it good policy to let me know how bloodthirsty and vindictive she would be if betrayed. So if a thought of the kind ever entered my mind, I discard it from this moment, for there is little doubt but that she would be as good as her word.

"Now I must prepare my plans and arrange about getting everything ready for the Sahibs' dinner in the palace on Friday, and I think there will be no difficulty in this, as I can get most of the articles from the Parsee merchant, Pestange, who will, I have no doubt, allow me a good percentage or 'dusturi'—for my own benefit—on what I buy from him ; and what I cannot get from him the Sahibs themselves will let me have out of the mess. I dare say I can also have the use of their cooks for that day—as they will not be required in the mess—and I can make an excuse of my anxiety to see everything well done for my presence—even though I am a Brahman—in the cook-room, when I shall, I hope, find an opportunity of dropping the arsenic powder into the rice pot without being seen, and so carry out the Rane's orders.

"There was a time I am convinced when she had a tender

feeling for me, and there is also no doubt but that others have been, perhaps, more favoured than I have; but, after the great service I am about to render, this feeling may again return combined with gratitude for having got rid of her enemies in so effectual a way, and Bolanath Teware may be Rajah of Ranepore yet before he dies!" Such was the satisfactory termination of Bolanath's thoughts as he left the palace of the Rane.

While the interview above described was going on the reader will perhaps remember that the female servant of the Rane, Gunga, was an attentive listener with her ear glued to the door of the room where it took place. She had heard all that had passed though she could see nothing, and when Bolanath retired she also slipped quietly into her own room which was near that of her mistress, and there began to think over what she should do. Her thoughts were as follows:—"My mistress evidently mistrusts me, or she would not have sent me away and would have permitted my presence, when she instructed Bolanath Teware in her hellish plans. I am glad she explained so clearly how the drawer is to be opened; I never even knew that there was a drawer in the cabinet, which I now remember was made for her some years ago by that very clever and ingenious workman, old Shew Lal Mestri. I have, however, only to press the carved head of Huneman to open it, should I wish to do so. I have not forgotten the kindness shown me by Elsie the wife of the Deputy-Commissioner when I was in trouble for concealing the birth of my poor little child, now no longer on this earth, for she interceded for me with Major Gordon who had the trial of the case, and explained to him how cruelly I had been treated, and so got him to let me off with a very slight punishment; and now is the time and opportunity for returning that kindness, for is not her husband among the number my mistress and Bolanath have doomed to death, and to so cruel a death too by poison.

"I have made up my mind and I shall go to Elsie to-night and tell her all I know, and be guided by her advice."

CHAPTER X.

IN a retired Bungalow, standing in a wooded garden, about half-a-mile from the city walls of Ranepore, Major Gordon and his native wife, Elsie, lived. As mentioned before, it was not generally known that they were really man and wife, in fact few were aware that the ceremony of marriage had been gone through between them, and fewer still cared to make any enquiries on the subject; so that Elsie had nothing in common with any of the female society of Ranepore; and even had the fact of her marriage been known, her position as a native woman would have excluded her from it, at any rate to a great extent.

On the evening of the day on which the interview between Bolanath and Luchme Bhie took place, as has been described in our last chapter, Elsie was sitting, about eight o'clock, in her garden enjoying the cool air after a very hot day when her servant came to say that a woman, who would not give her name or mention her business, wished to see her. Elsie desired that she should be sent to her where she was sitting, and shortly after Gunga Bhie the servant of the Rane came up to her, and having respectfully kissed Elsie's hand, said she had come on particular business and to make a communication which was for Elsie's ear alone, and she then commenced relating all that had occurred between Bolanath Teware and the Rane, and ended by saying that her gratitude for former kindnesses had led her to come and make this disclosure, and ask for advice as to how she was to act in the matter.

On hearing Gunga's narrative Elsie fell into deep thought and continued so for some minutes, then, as it would appear, having made up her mind, she took Gunga kindly by the hand, drew her towards her, and, speaking in a low though earnest voice she said :—" Gunga, the service you have rendered me and my husband this day has made us sisters, for I well know that what you have told me is as true as that the bright shining stars, looking down upon us two helpless women, are worlds, and were created and formed by the same great and mighty Spirit who made the world we live in, though I often wonder to myself why so good and beneficent a being has thought it right to allow His people, while on this earth, to undergo so many troubles, not to mention pain and sickness; but I think it must be to discipline them and make them fit for the next step in progress. At any rate I have no doubt but that these apparent evils are necessary, or they would not exist, and they may be, for all that I know to the contrary, the very steps of the ladder that is intended to help us to ascend to heaven.

" For the last few months I have often wished that I had not been rescued by my husband from the hands of my kinsmen, who were on the point of offering me up as a human sacrifice to the goddess of destruction, for then I should have escaped the care and anxiety of mind it has been my fate to undergo of late, and that also which is inevitably coming, for well do I know that this is only the beginning of our troubles.

" When you told me of the horrible plot to murder by poison all the Europeans in Ranepore my first thought was to go and tell my husband and put him on his guard, but on well considering the matter I now think the best and safest plan will be to oppose woman's cunning by woman's cunning. If I told Major Gordon, in the first place it is just possible he might not credit my story, and in the next, if he did, it might be the means of hastening the crisis, which I know full well cannot be far off. So Gunga we will trust in ourselves alone, and to no third person.

"I have just been thinking that as arsenic is a white powder and much resembles flour, if that harmless article could be substituted for it, Bolanath might with impunity be permitted to put it into the rice kettle, and nobody be a bit the wiser; and thus—it appears to me—the bloodthirsty design of the Rane might be frustrated. And who knows but that some fortunate circumstance may happen to avert the other evils we anticipate until the armies of England arrive from 'Wilāyt,' from whence my husband tells me they have already started, and are crossing the 'Kara Pani' to give help and assistance to their fellow-countrymen and women in Hindostan.

"It is very fortunate that you, Gunga, sleep in, and have the *entrê* to the Rane's, your mistress's room, which, as you describe, is next to one containing the cabinet in which the poison is, and is only divided from it by an archway, and also that your own room is similarly situated, and I think nothing will be easier than for you to find an opportunity when she is absent or sleeping to remove the poison and replace it with flour. Of course it must be put in the same paper that now contains the arsenic, otherwise our pious fraud might be discovered.

"But Gunga, remember and be careful not to be found out, for if you are certain death will be your fate. And now, my sister, you had better leave me, as your prolonged absence from the palace might cause suspicion, for those,—I observe—who do wrong themselves are always the first to suspect others; and believe me when I say, if it is possible for an evil spirit to enter into and dwell in a human form, one has certainly taken possession of Rane Luchme Bhie. Depend on it she will not hesitate to commit the most cruel and diabolical acts if she gets opportunities to do so, and they tally with her interests. She detests all the Sahibs and everything connected with them, though, indeed, if some reports about her are to be believed, her favours were pretty freely bestowed on Shakespear Sahib, when he was Political Agent of Ranepore;

but whether from a real liking for him or to further her own ends it is difficult to say—perhaps there was a little of both. Good bye again dear Gunga, and may Bhagwan keep you and guide you in the good work you have undertaken. But stay, before you go take this amulet as a mark of my affection, and wear it for my sake. It is supposed to have the power of protecting its owner from 'the evil eye,' and it was given me by a holy and saintly Biragee in gratitude for a kindness I rendered him long ago."

Saying this, Elsie hung round Gunga's neck a small quaintly-shaped gold locket. The two women then embraced and parted with feelings of mutual good will and affection.

Nothing of any great importance had taken place between the day of the Durbar and that on which all the European community of Ranepore were to partake of the hospitality of the Rane. Preparations had been made, the mess plate and crockery had been lent for the occasion, and had been removed to the palace temporarily, and the regimental cooks and servants had accompanied them, and for the day were to serve the Rane and prepare the feast. But on the night preceding that day an occurrence took place with which our readers should be made acquainted.

Gunga had watched carefully for an opportunity to carry out Elsie's plan, and at last she thought she had found one. She had sat by her mistress, Luchme Bhie, up to a late hour, and had—as was her custom—shampooed her to sleep before retiring to her own bed, which was in a room opening into that in which the Rane slept, and adjoining that in which the cabinet containing the poison was. Gunga rose, and to ascertain that her mistress was really sleeping soundly—as she appeared to be—passed the lamp once or twice before her eyes. There was, however, no movement or sign of consciousness, so Gunga thought she might safely venture to proceed to the cabinet. This she commenced doing slowly and stealthily with bare feet, every now and then stopping to look back at the form of her sleeping mistress. At last she found

herself standing in front of the cabinet, and began pressing the projecting figure of the image of 'Huneman,' on which the drawer flew open, but, much to her surprise and terror, with a sharp ringing noise, made by the wood of the drawer coming in contact with the edge of the cabinet in which it was fixed. Poor Gunga trembled from head to foot and felt as if her last day had come but, pulling herself together, she passed quickly and silently to a part of the room in deep shade, from which she could observe the Rane without being seen by her, and this she was able to do by a night light which she had left burning near her mistress.

The noise evidently awoke Luchme Bhie, for she sat up in bed, and Gunga heard her muttering to herself:—"I wonder what that noise was caused by? Very possibly the rats have upset something or one of them may have fallen from the roof; but the noise did not sound like that, and I thought just as I opened my eyes that I saw a shadow pass across the room on the opposite wall. In these troubled times it behoves me to be watchful."

On hearing this, Gunga, fearing the Rane might discover her, managed to creep on all-fours quietly and unseen to her bed and placed herself in an attitude of feigned sleep. She closed her eyes and waited to see what the Rane would do next. She was however greatly relieved on hearing her mistress again lie down and apparently court sleep. Gunga was the more thankful for this as, knowing the cabinet drawer was open, she felt that if the Rane took it into her head to examine it, discovery was inevitable.

After an hour or so Gunga thought she might again venture to the cabinet, and this time she succeeded in doing so without any further disturbance. She then removed the arsenic from the paper carefully and substituted some harmless wheat flour for it, and closing the drawer, returned to her bed well satisfied with her success, and soon fell fast asleep.

The Rane was the first to waken in the morning and calling Gunga to her, she said:—"Gunga, I have had a most

disagreeable dream last night, and it was all about you, who I thought had entered into a conspiracy against me. I cannot—for the life of me—recollect or call to mind what it was you were doing, but I connect it in some way with the cabinet in the other room, where, you know, I keep some valuable patent medicines, principally for the cure of the poor people who come to consult me and who cannot afford to pay for the medicines and prescriptions of the learned Hukēms of Ranepore. I hope Gunga you have not been tampering with these medicines, but I cannot get rid of the feeling that they are in some way connected with my dream about you—and, Gunga, I now observe that you change countenance? Come near girl, and let me feel the beating of your heart."

Gunga approached her mistress most unwillingly with fear and trembling, which of course quickened the action of her heart, but she said:—"Mistress, mine, your suspicions cut me like a dagger, and the very fact of your doubting me is calculated to excite and cause my heart to throb more than it is wont to do. But pray, do with your slave as you think right. You wear a 'Pashe Kubs' in your waist, if you suspect me, plunge it to the hilt in the breast of your faithful and devoted slave."

Luchme Bhie looked long and thoughtfully at her servant and then observed:—"What you say Gunga may be true and for your sake I hope it is so; but beware, girl, how you attempt to deceive me, for depend upon it I shall find you out if you do so, and it is hardly necessary for me to tell you what your fate would be. Stab you with my dagger, no! Such a death would not be yours, but one of lingering, painful torment, lasting for days, and perhaps for weeks or even months; torture far worse than death, by which you would pray to be relieved from your pain and agony. Have you never heard of the water torture Gunga? when the person undergoing punishment is so fastened that a drop of water—but a single drop—constantly and without ceasing continues to drop, drop, drop on one spot, on the top of the head, until it

begins by slow degrees to cause the brain to inflame, which is followed by excruciating agony and unendurable torturing pain, ending in delirium, madness, and death. Even such an end as this would be too good for you, if you deceive me. Take care Gunga, you know me of old; and now I think of it I shall look at the cabinet and judge for myself whether it has been tampered with or not. If it has, God help you Gunga, for it will be beyond the power of man or woman to do so!"

The reader may imagine what Gunga's feelings were while the Rane was delivering herself of this speech; but she showed a bold front, and the Rane signed to her to accompany her and went into the room containing the cabinet. Here, having made Gunga turn her back, she pressed the spring and the drawer flew open. She looked into it, and seeing it—as she thought—in the same state as she had left it was about to close it again, when she chanced to observe a few small particles of white powder on the bottom of it. This attracted her attention, and she thought to herself:—"I do not remember to have seen this before when I last opened the cabinet drawer, but they might have fallen out when I showed it to Bolanath. That however is improbable, as I did not open the paper containing the arsenic that I can remember. I wonder if any one has really had access to it?"

After a pause she appeared to have made up her mind, and turning to Gunga she said:—

"My dear Gunga forgive my words and suspicions, I have no doubt of your fidelity and affection for me, and all I have been saying was but in joke, and to see how you would take it; but I have of late observed that your health is not of the best, and I should not, even in jest, have caused you alarm or agitated you. I am, however, the more confirmed in my opinion, by the sudden tremour which came over you a little time ago, that your nerves are somewhat out of order and shattered, and I think a small dose of this most valuable soothing medicine would put you all to rights. Go and bring

me a small silver cup off the table, and I will mix you a draught which you had better take at once."

Gunga did as she was directed and returned with the cup and a "Lota" of water. When she was doing so the Rane was reasoning with herself in this way :—

"If Gunga has a knowledge of what is in the paper she will never swallow the dose, and by her objecting I shall know that she has combined against me and has been tampering with the contents of the cabinet and discovered what they are. If she is willing to drink it, this will prove her innocence and ignorance of what it contains, and the non-existence of any design on her part against me."

Thus thinking, the Rane took the cup from her servant's hand, and having filled it with water, she put a pinch of what she believed to be deadly poison into it—but which Gunga knew to be perfectly harmless—and handing it to Gunga, said "drink this, it will certainly do your nerves good."

Gunga knew that her mistress intended to poison her, but thought if she refused to drink the suspicions of the Rane would be confirmed, and under the circumstances she would either murder her herself or cause one of her followers to do so, and as she knew the dose to be harmless she did not hesitate to take it, and trusted to be able to escape before the Rane discovered that she had been deceived. So she put out her hand and at once took the cup and raised it to her lips, and was about to commence drinking when her mistress suddenly took it out of her hand again, and said :— "Gunga, I quite forgot that this medicine will not have its full effect if taken on an empty stomach and you have as yet had nothing to eat to-day, so you had better defer taking it until after your mid-day meal, when if you will come to me I will make up for you a fresh dose." Saying this Luchme Bhie threw the contents of the cup out of the window, and it fell in a cold shower of sparkling rain drops on the heads of several little Indian boys who—even at that early hour instead of attending school—were playing at "Geledunda," or tip cat,

under the palace walls, and who were much at a loss to account for the rain they thought was falling, as the sky was without a cloud and the sun shining bright and clear; but being much interested in the intellectual game they were playing, they did not trouble themselves greatly about it. One of them, however, with a wise shake of his head, remarked "that he thought the 'Bursat' or rainy season had commenced."

The Rane, as she imagined, thus ascertained by a trick that her servant was ignorant of the contents of the paper, for she argued, had such not been the case Gunga would never have proceeded in the unhesitating way she did to swallow poison. Gunga, on the other hand, with a woman's cunning saw through the plot and felt thankful to have escaped, but at the same time fully made up her mind, if opportunity offered, she would not be backward in repaying her mistress in her own coin, or, if unable to do so, she would as soon as possible effect her escape from the power of one so treacherous and vindictive, and who cared so little what she did, provided it suited her purpose and convenience.

CHAPTER XI.

ON the evening of the day referred to in the last chapter the kitchen of the palace was the scene of no small amount of animation and exertion on the part of those whose duty it was to prepare the unusually large repast to be placed before the European residents of Ranepore, the guests of the Rane. Excited cooks and their assistants stripped to the waist—and indeed to a great extent innocent of a superabundance of clothing below it—hurried here and there, plying their vocation in an atmosphere much resembling that of the hottest room in the well-known Jermyn Street Turkish Bath, which—the writer of this has been credibly informed—is kept up to such a temperature that its use is only resorted to when the resisting power of the aligator-like cuticle of an old Indian refuses to yield to a heat by which the skin of the habitué of the bath—being in a normal state—is easily brought under subjection, and readily pours forth a flood of moisture, a result so beneficial and health-restoring to all those who accustom themselves to the invigorating effects of the hot-air bath. But to return to our story. Among those we have mentioned might be seen also at times our old acquaintance Bolanath. He wore his usual costume of spotless white. The extreme heat had, however, caused him to throw open the upper part of his long, loose-flowing linen coat, and across his naked breast might be seen the sacred cord, which Brahmans alone have the privilege of wearing, as a mark of caste and sanctity.

Bolanath's face bore signs of anxiety and excitement which, however, to a careless looker on, might be attributed to the great heat of the kitchen. To a closer observer, however, the nervous working of his mouth and occasional quivering of the muscles of the face would give rise to surmises that his mind was far from being at rest and that his thoughts were none of the pleasantest.

Hid in the folds of his handkerchief was the paper he had obtained from the Rane's cabinet, which he believed to contain deadly poison, and which he was urged—partly by fear of Luchme Bhie, and to some extent by his own ambitious hopes and desires—to find an opportunity of conveying, unseen, into the rice kettle he saw boiling on the fire before him, with the praiseworthy intention of its causing the agonising death and destruction of all his mistress's unsuspecting guests. Bolanath moved round the room, now and then addressing a remark to the servants, and cautioning them to do their very best in preparing an appetising and sumptuous repast; for the credit of his mistress, he told them, was at stake, and that he himself had been deputed by her to superintend.

Having made the round of the different departments and satisfied himself which was the Chūlhā on which the rice was boiling, he loitered near it and anxiously looked for an opportunity, when not observed, of attaining his diabolical end, and at last he thought that fortune favoured him and the lucky moment had arrived, as all seemed to be engaged with their own particular duties, and none appeared to be looking his way. So, with the stealthy motion of the panther —Bolanath's by-name was "The Tendwa," or panther—he quietly and noiselessly raised the lid of the rice pot and pretending to use his handkerchief to wipe the perspiration from his forehead, he took out the paper of supposed poison and dropped the white powder out of it into the boiling rice, cautiously closing the lid, as he thought, without being observed by anyone, and having sauntered about a short

time longer, so as to avoid suspicion, he left the place and proceeded to the presence of his mistress to inform her of his success and congratulate her on what now appeared to him the certain accomplishment of her vile designs and wishes.

It is a remarkable fact that in this world very small occurrences of themselves often sway materially and interfere with the most matured and long-considered plans, and that too in the very moment of imagined success, and the truth of the old French proverb, "That tho' man proposes, God disposes," becomes strikingly apparent, and this was the case in the present instance.

In order, however, that the reader may become informed of this it is necessary to refer to two persons, who as yet have not figured in this narrative, namely, the head cook of the mess of the cavalry regiment, whose name was Doria, and his son, Budrōo, a boy of about twelve years old, the pride of his father, and heir to all his culinary arts and accomplishments, and an aspirant, on some future day, to the proud position of mess "Bawachie" when it should please Providence to remove his father, Doria, to a better world.

In order to acquire a knowledge of cooking Budrōo always acted as *aide de camp* to his father and thus educated himself so as to take his father's place when the time came for doing so. On the day we are writing of, when Budrōo was accompanying Doria from the military cantonment where they lived to the palace of the Rane, boy-like he loitered behind, gazing wistfully at the enticing stalls in front of the "Metaiwalla's" (or sweetmeat maker) shops, which lined the street through which they passed, and which, from the number of persons plying their vocation in it, went by the name of "Metaigun." As Budrōo looked, he longed much for the means to treat himself to a few of the tempting "Butassoos" piled in heaps before him, but, unfortunately, his poverty stood in the way of his gratifying his desire, and he wandered along looking on the ground, and as he did so, among a heap of rubbish piled for removal by the scavenger's cart he saw

something sparkle and on approaching nearer and removing the dust he found himself the possessor of a small square piece of looking-glass. At first he thought of trying to barter it for some sweetmeats, but hearing Doria calling him to come on he tied up his treasure-trove in the end of his cloth, and ran on and joined his father and the others of the party proceeding to the palace.

It happened that the duty for which Budrōo was detailed in the kitchen that day was to sit down before a gigantic cock turkey which was slowly roasting before the fire and to see that it revolved neither too quickly nor too slowly, so that all parts of it should have a fair quota of heat and yet not be overdone. It was also Budrōo's duty to baste the object of his care and keep it moist by an application of ghee or clarified butter, applied by means of a feather plucked from the wing of the bird himself. This duty Budrōo performed by dipping the said feather into the stock pot, and smearing it over the object of his solicitude from top to bottom; but now and then, we regret to say, rewarding himself for his trouble by passing the feather between his lips, and treating himself to a taste of the savoury drippings.

During the operation Budrōo's thoughts often reverted to the Metaiwalla's shops, and from that it naturally followed that he remembered his little piece of much-prized looking-glass; and as the turkey appeared to be making fair progress and at that moment did not require basting he thought he would indulge himself with a peep at it; so he took it out of the end of his cloth in which he had tied it up and examined it and having done so his next idea was to look at himself in it and this he proceeded to do just as Bolanath had commenced his diabolical proceedings.

Bolanath, as has been explained, had, as he thought, satisfied himself that no eyes were on him and to a certain extent in this he was right but it chanced that Budrōo—whose back was turned to him—at this precise moment raised up his little piece of looking-glass with the intention of

admiring his amiable ebony-coloured visage just as Bolanath removed the lid from the rice pot, and Budrōo, much to his astonishment, saw the reflection in the glass of Bolanath going through the performance related above.

It at once struck Budrōo—who was, on the whole, a sharp lad—that it was, to say the least of it, an unusual occurrence for a Brahman, and more especially one in Bolanath's position, to meddle with a cooking pot containing food for persons with whom it would cause loss of caste for Bolanath to be in any way associated in eating or drinking. So Budrōo, instead of admiring himself, kept the reflection of the looking-glass on him and his proceeding, and to his amazement saw him drop a white powder into the pot, shut the lid, look about him for a few moments, and then slowly and deliberately move away.

Budrōo's first impulse was to go and communicate with his father and tell him what he had seen, but not observing him near and being impressed with the importance of attending strictly to his task of basting the now nearly roasted turkey, he put off speaking to his father, thinking he would do so the next time he saw him near, for it never came into Budrōo's head that any evil or treachery was intended.

As it happened, no opportunity offered for communication between Doria and his son until after the dinner had been served and Doria had betaken himself outside to breathe a little fresh air after the oppressive atmosphere he had been in so long. It was then that Budrōo—who was sitting by his father—informed him of what he had witnessed, at the same time remarking that having thought the matter over, he had come to the conclusion that Bolanath being a Brahman and a servant of the Rane's, probably had put a charm into the kettle so as to bring good fortune to the Sahibs who were his mistress's guests. He was very much astonished to receive a good hard cuff on the cheek from his father, who viewed the matter in a very different light, and said;—"You young 'Shitām,' why did you not tell me this before! God only

knows what may be the result of your not having done so; but mind Budrōo, as you value your skin, do not mention this to any other person; I must go and see Gordon Sahib at once."

Saying this Doria got up and having found one of the table servants, sent him with a message to Major Gordon to the effect that he, Doria, wished to see him on very important business which would brook of no delay.

This message reached Gordon sometime before the curry and rice was sent up—always in India the last dishes served at dinner—and he at once excused himself to the company, got up and came out where Doria anxiously expected him and who related to him what had occurred, adding that he felt certain this was an attempt to poison the European gentlemen and ladies and that he awaited Gordon's orders how to act.

Gordon thought for a moment, and having formed his plans, said to Doria :—"Go at once, and on some pretence delay the serving up of the curry and rice for a quarter of an hour, and then, if you do not hear from me further, send it up in the usual way as if nothing had happened. I will take good care no one eats of it." He then wrote a short note to Colonel McLeod asking him to come out for a few moments. On it being delivered McLeod also, on pretence of important business, joined Gordon, who informed him of what had taken place, and said :—

"I think, McLeod, if possible we should avoid giving any unnecessary alarm and I have formed a plan which, if you approve of it, I think will suit the circumstances. I propose that we return to the dining room as if nothing of any great consequence had happened and resume our dinner. By this we shall avoid frightening the ladies—whom we must think of first—I then propose passing round the table a slip of paper requesting no one to eat any of the rice—though helping themselves to it—for good reasons which will be explained hereafter and at the same time saying that there is no cause for alarm. I will tell Doria to secure the remainder of the

rice and we can test it at our leisure and discover if it has been really poisoned."

McLeod agreed to the proposal, but at the same time said:—"We must get hold of 'Bolanath,' and you had better tell one of your assistants—Macbean is the sharpest I think—to slip out quietly, and if possible without being observed, and take a body of police with him and arrest Bolanath and bring him a prisoner to your house if he will not come without it."

They then took Doria into their confidence, well knowing the old faithful Madrasse could be trusted, and returned to the dinner room and resumed their seats. Gordon having written out on a slip of paper what has already been mentioned with regard to avoiding eating any rice, passed it round the table, The effect on the company at large was rather to excite curiosity than fear, though there were several among them whose serious looks showed that they suspected more than they expressed. At last, however, the dinner came to an end, and the guests having wished each other good night, left the palace for their respective houses.

Gordon took an opportunity of telling Doria to secure the remainder of the rice, and to bring a portion of it to his house, where he had appointed to go with McLeod, and where Macbean was to bring Bolanath. He then joined McLeod, and they both rode together to Gordon's Bungalow, and having dismounted, entered and sat down to await the coming of Bolanath and Doria.

When Bolanath left the kitchen as has been described, jubilant and rejoicing at, as he believed, having accomplished his bloodthirsty plan, and that too without giving the slightest grounds for suspicion or endangering his own precious person he proceeded direct to the room which he knew was occupied by the Rane, and gave three slight knocks at the door—the usual intimation of his presence and desire for an interview. The door was opened by Gunga, who told Bolanath to enter, saying her mistress would receive him.

On his doing so the Rane turning to Gunga said:—"Gunga, you can go and breathe a little fresh air while I transact some business with Bolanath."

Gunga got up and went out, but placed her ear to the door as—the reader may remember—she did on a former occasion, and listened to hear what Bolanath had to say.

When the door closed Bolanath addressed the Rane to the following effect :—

" My much respected and loved mistress, your slave, ever faithful even unto death, has to inform you that he has carried out your instructions to the letter, and by this time there is little doubt but that the 'Sumblekar' which, by the grace of God and your benevolence, he was enabled to mix with the rice—and that too entirely unobserved—is certainly having its effects on the insides of the ungodly Kaffir dogs—our enemies, and those also of our religion—and before the sun rises to-morrow morning they will all have, he trusts, arrived safely in 'Gehanām,' the only place fit for them."

The Rane evinced outwardly but little excitement, though the nervous working of her fingers and twitching of the corners of her mouth, showed how anxious she really was to receive confirmation of the success of her murderous designs.

When Bolanath had related all that had happened, and had finished speaking, her eyes sparkled, and a demon-like smile of combined triumph and bitter hatred passed over her handsome face as she said:—" Bolanath, you have this day rendered me a service that shall never be forgotten by me." Suddenly, however, a thought seemed to strike her, for she paused for a moment and then continued: " You have done your part Bolanath, and you could have done no more; nevertheless, you know the proverb, 'that there is many a slip between the cup and the lip,' and already I begin to feel anxious to know whether there has been any such slip in our case, or whether some unforseen accident may not have occurred to thwart us—in fact, whether the

poison has been swallowed, and has really reached its intended destination. As you came here straight from the kitchen—I think I understood you to say—there has hardly been time for the poisoned dish to have been served as yet, so we must wait a little, and then you must go and see what has happened. You know, as my servant and manager of the feast, your going into the room would not cause any surprise, and you will thus soon see whether all has gone well for us or not."

Bolanath replied:—"Your wishes are your slave's laws, but I would venture to suggest that I should not appear on the scene at all, chiefly for your sake, and because I am your devoted slave and servant; for these Faringees are a desperate race, and easily roused, and might even while dying revenge themselves on you. As for myself I care not, all my thoughts are for your safety, my beloved mistress (here Bolanath leered and made gooseberry eyes at the Rane). I can easily see into the dining room from outside, as it is lighted up, without being seen myself, and this will be by far the safest plan."

The Rane gave Bolanath a look of contempt, and said:—"I fear, after all you are not much of a 'Bahādur; however, do as you propose, and come back and tell me the result."

As Bolanath rose and approached the door, Gunga, who had heard the conversation, skipped nimbly out of sight, and went straight to Elsie to inform her what she had seen and heard. Gunga had already found an opportunity of making Elsie aware of her success in substituting the harmless substance for the arsenic, so that Elsie's mind was at rest on that point.

CHAPTER XII.

ON Gunga's arrival at Gordon's house she found her friend Elsie reading in the sitting room, for her husband had taught her to read and write English and it was her greatest pleasure to improve herself and acquire a perfect knowledge of her husband's language.

She was now waiting his return home, and was undecided in her mind whether or not she should inform him of how she and Gunga had been able to trick and deceive the Rane and her follower Bolanath, and she welcomed Gunga on her arrival very warmly.

Gunga sat down near her, and placing her hand in that of Elsie, related all she had witnessed and heard pass between the conspirators and ended by saying :—" Elsie, though the matter was really a very serious one, I could not help laughing all over when I heard the Rane express her gratitude, and all as you know for nothing at all, to Bolanath. But now we must consider what is to be done next, and I think when Gordon Sahib comes home he should be told every thing; for though we two women have been successful and lucky heretofore, it appears to me matters are becoming too serious for our management, and God only knows what Luchme Bhie will do when she finds out that she has been deceived. She is certain to suspect me, and will perhaps either kill or imprison me; not that I should object even to die for you and the Sahib, but I can serve you both much better living than dead, and you know Elsie, every one prefers to live rather than to die though I am not quite certain

in my own mind whether they are right in this or not. But even the little squeaking, ill-favoured, long-nosed 'Chechundra,' worthless as its life appears to be, as it trots round the room prying and searching into all the dark corners and crevices for beetles and insects to satisfy its hunger, does its best to avoid death by being trodden on; and so, though I am quite willing to run any risks for you dear Elsie and your husband, I don't see why we should not have the best help and assistance we can, or that the horrid Rane should have it all her own way. Do you?"

Elsie replied:—"I begin to agree with you Gunga. Matters are much too serious for us to go on dealing with them single handed, and I have now made up my mind when my husband returns home to acquaint him with every thing; and I very much fear that I may be found fault with for not having done so before; but he must allow we, at all events, have acted very cleverly and successfully as yet.

"I hear the tramp of more than one horse coming up to the bungalow, and I fancy my husband is accompanied by some one; we had better, I think, retire into another room, and I will let my husband know we want to see him when I know who is with him."

McLeod and Gordon had not been seated more than a few minutes when a gentle tap at the door gave them intimation that some one wished to come in, and shortly after Elsie, who Gordon thought had retired for the night—for it was very late—entered, looking anxious and nervous, and said:—

"My dear husband I have something of such great importance to communicate, that I hope you will excuse my intruding on you while sitting with Colonel McLeod, and indeed I am very glad he is also here to hear what I have to say. I do not know him personally, as you are aware, nor indeed any of the Sahibs, except one or two of your most particular friends, but I must introduce myself to him."

Saying this Elsie bowed to Colonel McLeod, who at once held out his hand and said:—

"This is a pleasure I have often desired but hardly liked to ask for. I hope you will in future consider me one of your friends, as I am that of Major Gordon, and troublesome times, such as we now are experiencing, make friends very valuable." Saying this, McLeod shook Elsie warmly by the hand, and placed a chair for her to sit on.

Gordon then stepped forward and said:—"McLeod, you know how I am circumstanced, though we have never broached the subject of my connection with Elsie; but to clear up any doubt that may be in your mind, I think it right to mention that she is my wife, and one with whom I have never, as yet, repented having formed so near and dear a tie. I tell you this as I am quite aware of the liberty rumour has taken with her name and mine."

McLeod placing his hand kindly on Gordon's shoulder said:—"I will not hide from you Gordon that I have never really been certain of the relationship existing between you and the lady I now learn is your wife, and I am glad that you have taken me into your confidence, for I can most sincerely say I have none among my many friends for whom I have so great a regard and respect as I have for you; but let us now hear what Mrs. Gordon has to tell us, for I strongly suspect it is of an emergent and important nature."

On hearing this, Elsie related from the commencement how she and Gunga had conspired to thwart the plans and wishes of the Rane, and how they had succeeded in doing so. She then said:—"Gunga is now in the next room, and I will call her in order that she may confirm what I have told you."

On entering the room, Gunga saluted respectfully the two gentlemen present and related minutely in detail all she knew, bringing down her narrative to the time she left the palace and came to where she then was.

When Gunga had ceased speaking, Colonel McLeod said

with evident feeling:—"I think Gordon, whatever comes of this eventually, we must allow that your wife and her humble assistant have acted for us perhaps better than we could have done for ourselves, had we been made aware of the intended treachery, and also that we and all the Europeans of Ranepore owe a deep debt of gratitude to them. I am glad matters took the turn they did, as every day we can avert an open rupture with the ill affected—and there are very many such in Ranepore who outwardly assume to be our friends —the better chance we have of eventually staving off the evil day until aid comes from home, and we can set our foes at defiance.

"We must now however determine what our future action is to be regarding the Rane, and it appears to me that it would be our best policy to show no signs of our knowledge of the part she has taken, for I much fear we are not strong enough to deal with her as I would like to do. An open rupture with her means a rising of the city against us, and most probably a mutiny of the troops. What say you Gordon, are you of my way of thinking, or are you for more decided measures?"

Gordon considered well for some moments before replying, and then said:—"Though we may not be strong enough to quarrel openly with Luchme Bhie—and I agree with you that we are not—I can see no good reason why we should not—at any rate for the present—place Bolanath in a position in which he can do us no harm. Indeed, I think we are bound to do so. I have no great confidence in Bukshish Alle, the jailor, but I hardly think as matters stand at present he would act disloyally, if even for his own sake, and my advice is that Bolanath be placed in jail and out of harm's way, and that we should shape our course as if entirely ignorant of the complicity of the Rane. Our greatest difficulty will be to bring anything home to either Bolanath or Luchme Bhie without bringing Gunga into danger, which would be a poor return for her devotion and loyalty in acting in the

plucky way she has. So when Bolanath comes—which I hope he may—I propose we simply tell him that one of the servants saw him drop a white powder into one of the cooking pots, and ask him to explain his motive. He will most probably deny doing so, and he might then be placed in confinement pending further enquiries, and we can wait and see 'how the cat jumps,' or in other words how matters go; but it would throw the Rane off her guard if I wrote her a 'Khareta' telling her of what Bolanath is accused and asking her assistance in finding out what his object was, for she would then never suspect we knew she was at the bottom of the vile plot herself, and that we were aware of her being so.

"Though what I advise appears to me the safest plan of dealing with matters, I should very much like to give our oily friend a good fright, by telling him that if he is really innocent, he must prove the same by eating a small portion of the suspected rice. I quite see that we shall lay ourselves open to the imputation of wishing to destroy Bolanath's caste by making him eat food not prepared by himself or some other Brahman, but for his own sake he would not dare to mention what had occurred between him and the Rane; and I should like much to see the effect of imagination on Bolanath's internals, if he did eat what he really believes to be poison. I hear the tramp of people approaching, and I fancy it must be our man, and that he has been made a prisoner."

When McBean received orders to effect the arrest of Bolanath he belted on his revolver, and thus armed he went to the chief police station and carefully selected four constables of police, on whom he thought he could place reliance—two of them were "Seeks" and the other two Mahomedans, and ordered them to bring a pair of handcuffs and accompany him. His directions having been complied with, the party proceeded towards the palace.

The reader will perhaps remember that after Bolanath's

interview with the Rane, at her request he had again gone to that part of the palace where the entertainment had been given. McBean, of course, was not aware of this, but he had a shrewd suspicion he would find Bolanath lurking about the palace, watching to see the effect the poison he thought he had administered to his mistress's guests, had produced.

Bolanath did not enter the room where the dinner had been given but took up his position outside at an open window where, the guest room being lighted up, he could see all that went on without being himself visible to those within. He had not been there many minutes when, to his surprise, instead of seeing his mistress's guests suffering from the effect of the diabolical dose he imagined he had administered them, he saw them cheerfully and apparently in perfect health, wishing each other good night, and leaving the palace for their respective bungalows.

Bolanath stood wondering to himself what the cause of his failure could be when his quick ear told him of the approach of some one behind him, though in the dark he could not clearly see who it was; but his guilty instincts warned him he had better make off as, whoever it might be, it was just as well that he should not be seen where he then was. With his usual silent panther-like step he therefore at once began to do so. On glancing back he saw he was being followed and so he increased his quick walk to a run. But running in the dark—as probably most of my readers are aware—is not always a safe operation, and Bolanath found this to be the case, for he had not progressed for more than twenty or thirty paces when, turning round the corner of the building, he came in somewhat violent collision with some one moving in exactly the opposite direction, and though Bolanath being the weightier of the two knocked over the other individual—our friend, little Budrōo, who happened to be going home from the palace that way—yet Bolanath himself also came heavily to the ground, flat on his face,

and before he could recover his balance, he found himself a prisoner in the hands of his unknown pursuer, who proved to be Sher Sing one of the 'Seek' police constables, who grasped him by the throat, which he proceeded to compress in a most unpleasant and, to Bolanath's ideas, a very unnecessary way, while one of the other policemen clasped the handcuffs over his wrists; and McBean, who had closely followed his men, said in an undertone:—"Bolanath, make no resistance, it would be useless, but get up and accompany me to the bungalow of the Burra Sahib of the district." As a precautionary measure, and to prevent the chance of escape, a rope was passed round Bolanath's waist, who saw clearly that there was nothing left for him but to submit; and having expressed his astonishment and surprise at what had happened, emphasized by assertions of innocence and good will towards the Government, and particularly the Sahibs who represented it at Ranepore, he did as he was directed, and accompanied his escort towards Gordon's house. So thus twice in one night, little Budrōo proved himself to be—though quite unintentionally—Bolanath's evil genius, and the cause of his coming to grief.

When McBean arrived at Gordon's bungalow with Bolanath he left his prisoner outside in charge of the guard and went in himself to the room where McLeod and Gordon were sitting waiting his arrival.

McLeod said:—"Well McBean, I see you have been successful by your looks, and have secured our fat friend Bolanath. Did you find any difficulty in arresting him?" McBean replied:—"I found him as I expected hanging about the dining room in the pious hope (I imagine) of gloating over the dying agonies of his mistress's guests; but, thanks to the faithful services of old Doria, this hellish plot has failed. He made off at once on hearing our approach with Sher Sing in close pursuit, and had it not been for the fortunate circumstance of his having stumbled over little Budrōo (Doria's son) and come a cropper, he might have

escaped in the dark; but no sooner was he down than Sher Sing had him by the throat, and we soon slipped a pair of handcuffs on his wrists, after which he submitted very quietly to what he considered his fate, and here he is outside in charge of the police guard."

"Very well done indeed McBean," McLeod remarked. "You could not have managed better, and I gather from what you say that no one but the guard and the boy Budrōo are aware of the capture?"

McBean replied:—"No, I think not, as we met no one *en route* here, and as far as I know nobody witnessed the capture; I have taken the precaution of bringing Budrōo with me, and as I found his father here, I have made the boy over to him so as to prevent his talking about what he saw and indeed took an active part in."

McLeod expressed his satisfaction with the arrangement and directed the prisoner to be brought in. Bolanath entered the room in charge of the Seek constable who had captured him, and who still held him secured by the rope which had been fastened round his waist, and McLeod having directed it to be removed and that the constable should retire, he said to Bolanath:—

"We have felt it necessary to send for you to explain why you have thought it right to flavour the food which had been so liberally provided by your mistress, Rane Luchme Bhie, for her guests, and also to ask you what the substance was which you were seen to put into it. I need hardly warn you that you had better speak the truth."

CHAPTER XIII.

BOLANATH was quick to perceive that his secret had been discovered, but having observed also that the poison had, from some unaccountable cause failed to take effect, bethought himself that his best plan would be to acknowledge what he had been accused of (well-knowing that he must have been observed while tampering with the rice), and invent some excuse for what he had done; so he said:—"Sahib, I do not for a moment wish to deny having put something in the rice kettle, but what I did was intended for the good of my mistress's guests. I thought as these were evil times, I would take this opportunity of introducing a 'Munter' or charm into the food to be partaken of, and so having provided myself with some leaves from the holy 'Tulsee' plant, and pounded them into a powder, I obtained the blessing of one of the most sanctified Brahman, 'Pujares,' of the holy city of Benares on it, who told me that whoever partook of this would be most fortunate, and proof against every evil influence. I took advantage of this happy occasion to introduce my charm into the food of the 'Sahibs' and Mēm Sahibs (who may God always keep under His protection), so that they might be prosperous and safe from mishap and evil of every kind. If I have done wrong I hope I may be forgiven as I acted with the best motives, and I knew the Sahibs, having no belief in charms, had I asked permission to do what I have done would never have granted it, so I took it on myself to do them good even without their knowing of it. In return for this I have been arrested and disgraced by having 'Hath Kurrahs' placed on

my wrists (like a thief or a murderer), and have been tied up with a rope like a bullock.

"But now I have explained my conduct I have no doubt but that I shall be set free again, for is not the justice of the Sirkar Bahādur like that of Nosherawān."

On the termination of Bolanath's speech there was heard a slight tittering sound as of suppressed laughter from the room next to that in which he was speaking. This, we may inform the reader, was caused by Gunga's suppression of an irresistible inclination to laugh on hearing Bolanath's statement, but for which she was found fault with by Elsie, who could, however, herself hardly keep from an uncontrollable fit of laughter.

Bolanath, whose hearing was as sharp as that of a lynx, caught this sound, and was somewhat puzzled to know what it meant.

McLeod speaking to Gordon said:—"Well, Gordon, what do you think of our friend's assertions? Have you any question you would like to put to him?" Gordon said:—"Yes, I have, and with your permission I will do so."

"Friend Bolanath, your story is a very plausible one (in your own estimation) I have no doubt, but before we credit it we must have some proof of your veracity. Now, it appears to me that this can very easily be given by you, and what I would propose is, that if the substance you put into our food is really what you describe it to be, and is in no way hurtful, perhaps you will not object to swallow some of the rice in which you have mixed it. Your doing so will be a convincing proof of your integrity and innocence. I have had the remainder of the rice brought here for this purpose. What do you say to this, Bolanath? Of course, I am aware that your doing as I propose will put you out of caste, but a Brahman of your position and sanctity can easily get absolution and restitution to caste by spending a few hundred rupees in feeding the Brahmans of Ranepore and its vicinity. Do you like my suggestion?"

Bolanath turned a yellowish green colour from fear, for he believed the rice to be really poisoned (though he could not account for its not having affected those who were supposed to have eaten it); but it now struck him this might possibly be accounted for by their having been warned by McLeod and Gordon not to eat it, as they were evidently aware of what had occurred. Bolanath found himself on the horns of a dilemma, for if he refused to eat it was almost a confession of guilt, and if he did not, and complied with Gordon's request, his doing so might cause his death. He was silent, not knowing what to do or say, and Gordon called out "bring in the rice," on which Doria (who was waiting with it outside) entered the room carrying a dish containing boiled rice covered over with a cloth, and at a sign from Gordon placed it before Bolanath. Gordon pointing to it, and at the same time placing his revolver on the table (as a significant hint to the prisoner), said :—

"Friend Bolanath, you have your choice, eat and live, (for if the substance is harmless you will live), or prepare to leave this world," and putting his watch also on the table he continued :—"I give you but five minutes to decide."

The reader must not suppose that Gordon really intended shooting Bolanath in the event of his refusal, for he had no such intention; his desire was only to punish him for his treachery, and under circumstances such as he was placed in he could hardly be blamed if he experienced some small degree of satisfaction and pleasure in seeing the abject terror with which Bolanath viewed the alternative put before him. Bolanath looked round the room in despair, but thought that before he committed himself to anything, he would appeal to Colonel McLeod as Gordon's superior officer, and throwing himself at that gentleman's feet, he began to say :—

"Oh Sahib, just and benevolent, protector of the poor and nourisher of Brahmans, you cannot surely allow the Zilla Sahib to treat a faithful well-wisher of the 'Kumpany Bahādur' in this way. I claim your protection."

McLeod, a brave man himself, to whom personal fear and selfishness were unknown sensations, felt the greatest contempt for the supplicant for mercy and had he not been aware of the unscrupulous and cruel nature of Bolanath, who without hesitation (to suit his own selfish views), had doomed so large a number of his unoffending fellow-creatures to a painful and sudden death—he might also have entertained a feeling of pity for him. He however replied :—" Bolanath, I cannot see any hardship in what Major Gordon asks you to do, if you are innocent the simple fact of eating a little rice cannot injure you. For, though it may be against your caste prejudices to do so, you can have no difficulty in purifying yourself and regaining your position by the expenditure of a little money ; and if you are guilty, then you will have been but fairly treated by being made yourself to experience the pangs and agony you intended so many others to have suffered."

Bolanath thought for some time and at last made up his mind that his only chance of life was to betray his mistress the Rane, and this he decided on doing. So, coming again to a sitting position, he addressed both McLeod and Gordon and said :—" Oh Sahibs, have mercy on me and I will reveal all and tell you every thing truthfully, I swear by Bhawani, if you will only spare my life. Will you promise to do so ?" McLeod replied :—" We can enter into no agreement with you, nor make any promises. Please yourself about confession, all I can tell you is that if you do not eat of your own accord I shall make Doria force some of the rice down your throat. Your five minutes have nearly expired."

Bolanath replied :—" I will confess my crime and trust to you for pardon. I am, as you know, the servant of the Rane Luchme Bhie, and bound to do her bidding. It was she who formed the plan of poisoning her guests, and it was she who supplied the ' Sumble-kar,' and it was under the fear of instant death only that I agreed to join in the plot. And now that I have told you the whole truth, to make up for what I

have been made to do (quite against my inclination) and am prepared to betray the Rane and even to give evidence against her (though I hope you will not call on me to do this) I entreat you to spare my life and I will be your slave for the rest of my days." Here Bolanath again clasped McLeod's feet with his hands and began rubbing his forehead on the ground, much to the delight of Gunga, who was peeping into the room through a hole in the 'Purda' which formed the door and divided the room from that in which she and Elsie were sitting.

McLeod spurned Bolanath from him with a kick of his foot saying:—"You are even a more despicable scoundrel than I took you for. To save your wretched life you are willing to betray your mistress. I have power of life and death delegated to me by the Government, and if you do not at once commence eating the rice you so heartlessly intended for the destruction of poor women and children who never injured you, I shall hold a court and condemn you on your own statement to be hung—and I shall cause the sentence to be carried out at once—so make your choice."

Bolanath, on hearing this, believed that there only remained to him to choose between two deaths, and he gave the preference to that which appeared to him the least certain and dreadful, and after some hesitation he began eating the rice which Doria, with a benign smile on his old bronze weather-beaten face helped him to.

When Bolanath had with difficulty managed to swallow some six or seven mouthfuls, McLeod in sheer pity permitted him to discontinue and said:—

"I will now have you taken to the jail, where you can remain for the short time you have to live. McBean, will you be so kind as to escort the prisoner there and place him in charge of Bukshish Alle the Darogha, with strict orders that he is to communicate with no one; and, Bolanath, I advise you to say nothing about what you have told us—even should opportunity offer. But my advice is almost unnecessary, as

in all probabillty you will not have long to live. If you are a wise man you will employ your remaining moments in repentance for your misdeeds in this world before you enter the next. But stay, before you go I will have your statement taken down in writing and attested. Gordon will you be good enough to do so." This having been done Bolanath placed his signet ring to his confession as a proof of its authenticity, after which he was conveyed to jail.

On his arrival there he was, by McBean's orders, confined in a small detached room by himself and left to his—as the reader will anticipate—not over pleasant meditations.

For some time he sat in momentary expectation of the commencement of the pains, which he well knew were the forerunner of death by poison, and his imagination on several occasions even led him to think they were commencing. However, several hours having passed in which he experienced very unpleasant sensations inside, though no actual pain, Bolanath, though very nervous and miserable (as he well deserved to be), began to think over what had occurred with glimmerings of hope that his affairs were not quite in the desperate state he believed them to be. And it occurred to him that, whatever was the cause, there must have been some mistake regarding the substance he had taken from the drawer of the Rane being the poison she represented it to be, for neither had it affected those whom he imagined had partaken of it at the dinner nor did it appear to be having any injurious effect on himself. For the latter he felt thankful at any rate as he now saw some chance of life. On the other hand he began to regret having confessed and implicated his mistress the Rane, who, (if even he escaped from the hands of the European gentlemen) would, he knew, revenge herself on him and he also remembered that by his written statement he had put it out of his power to deny his confession. Had he only been aware of this before how differently would he have played his cards; but even now if he could only get out of jail and escape to Cawnpore or elsewhere all might be well and how

happy in comparison would he be. But then it passed through his mind this would be at the sacrifice of all his worldly goods, as the Rane would at once seize them and probably out of revenge torture or kill some of his relations. It will be seen that Bolanath was not having a very pleasant time of it, but he finally made up his mind to trust to fate and be guided by circumstances, and before very long he dropped off into a deep sleep and begun dreaming he was married to the Rane and had become Rajah of Ranepore, and had condemned McLeod, Gordon, and all the other Sahibs and Mēm Sahibs to be hung, drawn, and quartered, and that he was exulting over and enjoying their terror and agonies, when all of a sudden the scene changed, and he thought he was lying on his back, with "Sher Sing" sitting heavily on his breast compressing his windpipe, just as he had done some hours before when he captured him. He then awoke with a start and on looking up saw a dark-visaged, powerful looking man standing over him with a lantern in his hand, the dim light of which added to the weird ghost-like appearance of the scene. Bolanath after a few moments recognised his visitor as an old acquaintance (he could not exactly consider him as a friend), and, sitting up, scanned his countenance attentively so as to be able to form an opinion whether he was to consider this early visit as one likely to be of advantage to him or the contrary.

CHAPTER XIV.

BUKSHISH ALLE was the first to break silence, which he did by saying:—"May I ask, Bolanath, why you have been sent here and placed under my charge? I was absent from the jail when McBean Sahib brought you," (this was not true, but Bukshish Alle had not quite made up his mind whether it was to his interest to befriend Bolanath or not), "and I would like to know what you are accused of and whether you think it worth while making me your friend or whether you expect any favour or indulgence. If you do, you know these sort of things must always be paid for beforehand."

Bolanath quite understood the jailor's suggestion, and taking off a gold Kurrah (which the reader may remember he had received from the Rane), he handed it over to Bukshish Alle and said:—"Be my friend, Darogha Sahib, and this, valuable as it is, will be but little in comparison to what I shall bestow on you if you will do what I ask you and let me escape from this horrid and unjust confinement."

Bukshish Alle took the "Kurrah" weighing it in his hand after a careful inspection, said:—"Truly friend this looks like genuine and pure gold. I will keep it for you Bolanath, but I can hardly agree to let you escape at this price, when my doing so would very likely lose me my employment as the Sirkar's jailor. We must however talk over matters and see what can be done to make you comfortable. But pray remember this Bolanath that I take nothing for

granted. If indeed you should feel inclined to make it worth my while to connive at your escape, I must have my reward paid beforehand. I am too old a hand to take promises for payment. No, no! I must have the ready down, and no grumbling. And perhaps it is best to tell you at once to avoid any misunderstanding, that the 'Lohar' (Blacksmith) attached to the jail has a nasty knack of fixing on a handcuff just a shade too small in size on the wrists of prisoners—who don't see the necessity of tipping the jail authorities—and of leaving them on for several days without taking them off. I need hardly tell you how painful it is to have the iron of the 'Hath Kurrah' constantly pressing on the wrist bone. I have been told, indeed, that the pain becomes so agonising from its continuance and so intense day and night, preventing sleep or rest of any sort, that those who are so wilful—from shere stinginess—as to put themselves in the way of suffering this pain, at last long for death to relieve them from their unbearable agony. Of course you will perceive the remedy is in their own hands and they have only themselves to blame, and have but to deal liberally with the jailor and other jail servants to be not only entirely exempted from this suffering, but even to have such luxuries as milk, ghee, and even tobacco supplied to them while in confinement in jail."

The hint thus given by Bukshish Alle was not lost on Bolanath (for it is wonderful how quickly one rascal comprehends another), and he said:—

"I quite understand, Darogha Sahib, that the infamously low pay you get from the Sirkar (only 150 rupees a month) is very much too little to provide a man in your position of life with what he has a right to expect and I for one am quite willing to contribute to make you comfortable. The gold 'Kurrah' I have given you is only an earnest of what is to follow; but to come to the point. How much would it suit you to take to undergo the risk of dismissal and allow me to escape? If I can afford to do so I will give it to you."

"Now you speak like a sensible man Bolanath, but it

would never do to let you go the very day you have been sent here, and I do not think I could agree to do so even some days hence under, say 2,000 rupees. You are said to be a wealthy man, Bolanath, and could easily afford this sum, more particularly when your life depends on your finding it."

Bolanath replied:—"The amount you demand is certainly large, and, if I give it you, how am I to know that you will not retain it and keep me in prison also?"

"That," the jailor replied: "you must trust to my honour for—'all are not thieves that dogs bark at'—and if I promise, I will certainly perform. If, however, you agree to my terms, you must make arrangements for payment at once, this very day, and I will then form a plan so that it will appear you have made your escape without my being to blame."

Bolanath then asked for paper and a pen and ink, which the jailor produced from his "Kumerbund," and handed them to his prisoner, who wrote the following letter to his wife:—

"To my beloved wife, Bekha Bhie, know this, that I, your husband, am in great trouble and danger of death, and that the bearer of this must be paid 2,000 rupees 'Kuldar' on presenting this note to you. You must find this sum and give it to him, taking his receipt for the same. You know where I keep my money hid and as you love me and expect to see me again living, do not neglect my instructions."

Bolanath presented this to Bukshish Alle and said:—"If you will send this note by a trusty messenger, or take it yourself, I have no doubt but that you will get the money you demand; but, Darogha Sahib be quick, in these times there is no knowing what an hour may bring forth. The Sahibs may have me brought out and may take it into their wise heads to hang me, and then I shall lose my life and you your money!"

Bukshish Alle replied:—"Before I send your note just strike out that part of it where you tell your wife to take a receipt. You don't expect I am such a fool as to have that sort of evidence against me, should you at any time get your

head up, and, being in power, wish to retaliate, no, no, Bolanath, none of that if you please!"

The objectionable part was erased, and Bukshish Alle taking it, then observed:—"Bolanath, I know you are somewhat in the confidence of the Bhie Sahiba, the Rane, and I should like to be informed—as between two friends, you know—what her intentions are? We hear reports of her being in communication with 'Nana Sahib' of Bettour, and that the Sepahees here intend rising against the Government, and that she encourages them to do so. What do you think of all this? You may as well take me into your confidence, as perhaps if a rising does take place, I may—with my Jail Burkin-dāzes—be able to render valuable assistance to the cause I take up and favour."

Bolanath replied:—"I will place entire trust and reliance in you, and will tell you in the first place the real cause why I have been imprisoned here." The reader will probably perceive that Bolanath knowing that he had lost his position of trust with the Rane (by having betrayed her secret to the European gentlemen), which he could never regain, saw that his best policy was to make a friend of Bukshish Alle by giving him his entire confidence. He went on to say:—"You must know that my mistress the Rane hates the Sahibs and all connected with them and that she gave the entertainment last evening with no other intention than that she might find an opportunity of poisoning them all. She selected me—much against my will—as her agent to carry out her plans, and told me to put 'Sumbel-kar' into their food, which deadly poison she herself supplied me with, and I took an opportunity of putting a large quantity of it into the rice kettle when no one was looking (as I thought), and I was anticipating the deadly result and looking in at the dining room window expecting to see the 'Sahibs' and 'Mēm Sahibs' lying about the floor in agony, when to my surprise they all appeared in the best health and high spirits, and wishing each other good night (as you know is their custom by shaking

hands), they began departing to their several houses. I was standing wondering at this when all of a sudden I became aware that I was being watched, and I then tried to escape, but was caught by a 'Shitām' of a Punjabe constable and taken by McBean Sahib to the Zilla Sahib's bungalow, where I found the Commissioner and the Magistrate Sahib and, will you believe it Bukshish Alle, I was made actually to eat of the very rice I thought I had poisoned, and so had my caste taken away (at any rate for a time). At first I was of opinion that this was a plan formed to take away my life, but now I rather think the Sahibs only wished to punish me by frightening me—which they did most effectually and almost to death. But the worst of it is, I foolishly made a written confession of all that had occurred and like an ass I signed it with my signet ring, and was then sent off here. You will now see Darogha Sahib that when yeu let me escape (which you have so kindly promised to do) it will be impossible for me to remain in Ranepore as my confession has implicated my mistress the Rane (who never forgives), so that I must make off to Gwalior, Indore, or Cawnpore. For I know that devil Luchme Bhie would stab me with her own hand—(and do you know her dagger is always dipped in poison to make sure?) rather than let me escape after what I have done; and indeed I am safer here than I would be at large in the city of Ranepore. Now you know all I have to tell you and I am in your hands. God help me! for I see no way of helping myself."

Bukshish Alle—however weak or loose his code of morals might be in connection with the routine of life—as a Musulman and follower of the Prophet had naturally the greatest contempt and abhorrence for the idolatry and image worship of the Hindoo, so closely connected with caste prejudices. On hearing this statement he could not but help feeling therefore a slight degree of satisfaction, and even amusement, on Bolanath's relating to him his having been forced to eat of the food which he himself had caused to be prepared and mixed with poison for the destruction of innocent persons,

and which was to him unclean, and calculated to destroy caste. Nor could he resist giving Bolanath to understand at what a disadvantage he stood, as a Hindoo, to himself, more particularly at a time like that now present, so he said:—"You are not a bad fellow Bolanath for a Hindoo, a Brahman, and a worshipper of images, but if you are a wise man you will renounce and abjure all this and join the true religion and become one of the faithful; and it more especially behoves you to do so at the present crisis, as before long, the Mahomedan religion will govern and be supreme in all Hindostan. The King of Delhi will shortly regain his throne, and then those who do not of their own free will adopt the only true faith will be forced to do so in a very summary and painful manner by the edge of the sword. Think on this my friend, and if you are wise follow my advice.

"But now as to the present position of affairs and with regard to yourself, I will take your letter to your wife—in money matters I never trust others—and on my return I will decide what is best to be done. Good bye Bolanath, keep a good heart and do as I bid you, and all will be well with you."

Bolanath was obliged to be contented with this and to wait the turn matters might take, relieved from his anxiety to a certain extent by the knowledge that there was now a fair chance of getting out of his difficulties after all, with at any rate—life.

When the guard in charge of Bolanath had left Gordon's Bungalow and was out of hearing, both Gordon and McLeod gave vent to an unrestrained burst of laughter in which Elsie and Gunga heartily joined for they had been listening and had observed all that had occurred, from the next room, though themselves unseen.

"Did you remark Gordon," said McLeod, "the greenish yellow tint that came over that unmitigated scoundrel's face as he began his forced meal of what he imagined to be the last earthly food he would ever partake of? I fancy he must have thought death by poison preferable to the disgrace of

being publicly hanged—I wonder how he is now. It is very probable his imagination is playing him tricks, and that he is beginning to feel the internal pains himself which he intended for others. I am sure I hope so, and that they will give him a good twisling. If it was not that I do not think it politic to break with the Rane, I should have tried and condemned him at once, and sentenced him to be hanged; but doing so might, and I certainly think would, bring on the very crisis we wish so much to avoid, more particularly on account of the ladies and children. Were they only safe and out of danger, no one would welcome open warfare more than I would; for the continued tension of mind in which we are now kept is becoming to me almost unbearable. I have been persuading my wife to go away to some safe place, such as Sugor or Jubulpore, while she can do so; but she says nothing will make her leave us, and what our fate is, that will also be hers! To me it is evident therefore that we must meet cunning with subterfuge at least for the present, however much against my grain it is to stoop to do it. So, in the first place, write a 'Khareta' to the Rane, forwarding her Bolanath's written confession, treating it as an invention of his to throw the blame on others so as to spare himself. His treachery will burst like a shell in the enemy's camp, for matters are not yet ripe with them for an open rupture with us and they will begin to distrust each other—That at any rate will score in our favour."

Gordon replied "I quite agree with what you say;" and having sent for one of his Hindoo writers (one whom he could trust), he swore him to secrecy and dictated the following letter to the Rane:—

"My much respected friend and well wisher to the British Rajh—The chaste and virtuous Rane Luchme Bhie, with respect and good wishes.—Know that a most unforeseen and unfortunate occurrence has taken place. It is no less than the treachery and conspiracy of one of your servants to poison all your esteemed and much respected guests at the enter-

tainment you so liberally invited them to last night. In short, Bolanath Teware was seen putting a white powder into the food which was being prepared in the kitchen; and on being arrested and questioned, he confessed his crime; and, to our wonder and astonishment, stated that he had been urged to this by you, our friend and hostess, and had been supplied with 'Sumble-kar' by you for this very purpose.

"Of course we do not believe for a moment what he says about so faithful a well-wisher of the Sirkar as you have proved yourself to be; but we have thought it necessary to inform you of this and ask your advice and opinion as to what should be done to Bolanath. His written confession is enclosed."

Gordon having signed and sealed this document (which gave him anything but satisfaction to dictate), he sent it by his own orderly to Luchme Bhie, and told him to wait for a reply.

McLeod then said—"I will now leave you, Gordon, but when you have got the Rane's answer to-morrow, please bring it to me at my house, and we can then decide what our future action is to be." Then he mounted his horse and rode slowly home, enjoying the coolness of the morning—for day was just breaking as he left. As he did so, it passed through his mind that he would again try and get his wife and family and also the other ladies and females of Ranepore to leave the place while there was yet time; for there could now be no doubt of the attitude the Rane would take before long and it was clear that no mercy could be expected from her if she came into power. Finally (without being aware that he was speaking aloud) he said to himself—"I feel convinced, though we may not live to see it, the Government will get over this." And the reader will learn in time whether this prognostication of the future was correct or not.

CHAPTER XV.

WHEN McLeod left the party assembled at Gordon's Bungalow, there remained behind Elsie and Gunga, who, with Gordon, began to consider what they had better do; for Gunga felt that though as yet the Rane was not aware that she had any knowledge of what had transpired, or of Bolanath's complicity with her in the attempt to poison; yet she had far too exalted an opinion of that lady's sharpness of perception and ability to worm out information (when desirous of doing so) to think herself in any way safe. She said, however addressing Gordon and his wife Elsie:—"I think now I had better get back to the palace as soon as I can. It is my only chance of avoiding being suspected; but on arrival there, if I find that the Rane is in any way aware of my having paid you this visit, I must take the very first opportunity of leaving her service altogether and going away from Ranepore, as I should never be safe from her anywhere here, unless perhaps under your protection, and in your house, and even then she would find means of reaching me. But if I find she suspects nothing I will of course remain in hopes of being of service to you as I have been on this occasion. Not that I take any great credit to myself, for even had I not exchanged the arsenic for harmless flour the Sahibs and Mēm Sahibs would have escaped without my help, Bolanath having been seen by Budrōo to put the powder into the food, and no doubt had it really been 'Sumble-kar'—as was intended—the same would have taken place. God is good and was watching over the 'Sahibs,' and they would have been saved without poor Gunga's aid."

Gunga then prepared to leave her friends and drew her "chaddar" over her head and face so as to conceal her features, and after having been affectionately embraced by Elsie, and having taken leave of Gordon with a respectful "salaam," she first peeped out to see that there was no one watching her outside, and having satisfied herself that there was not, she stole stealthily away and took an unfrequented path which led to the city and the palace of the Rane. Here she in due time arrived and, entering, took up her usual position in the room of her mistress, whom she found reclining on her couch evidently in no easy frame of mind. On Gunga's entrance she beckoned her towards her, and on her approach she said :—

"Gunga, you have been absent until an unusually late hour, where have you been, and what have you been doing?"

Gunga replied :—"Yes, I have remained out longer than I intended. I was called away to the death-bed of my aunt, Lookēra, who lives two coss from Ranepore in the village of Lascergown and as she was in great pain and had no one to attend to her but an old half-blind Bhie who lives in the village near her, I trusted to the well-known kindness of my mistress and remained with my poor aunt longer than I should have done. I hope I am forgiven."

The Rane appeared to give credence to the statement of her servant, but said :—

"Gunga, I cannot make out what has become of Bolanath, he left me a long time ago to do a service I required of him and he has not returned yet. Just step over to his house—it is not far off—and see if he has gone home. I think something must have happened to him, or he certainly would have come back with the information I required."

Gunga at once left her mistress's presence to seek out Bolanath—or rather to pretend to do so—at his house, and when she reached the street day had already broken and the usual morning stir had commenced amongst the inhabitants of Ranepore. As Gunga approached Bolanath's house—

for though she well knew he was not there it was necessary that she should go through the form of enquiring for him—she saw approaching it a person with whom her misfortune had made her acquainted. For, as the reader may remember, she had been charged with the crime of concealing the birth of her illigitimate child, and had been an inhabitant of the Ranepore jail while undergoing her trial. The person Gunga saw approaching Bolanath's house from an opposite direction was no other than Bukshish Alle, the jail Darogha—who, as the reader is aware, had business with Bolanath's wife, Mussumbat Becka Bhie. Gunga at once perceived that the facts of Bolanath being in jail, and the visit of the Jailor to his wife, were occurrences, the one, connected with the other; and she began to consider how she was to find out what this visit portended, and how it was likely to affect her and her friends. She decided that her best plan would be to go forward and—as she at first intended—assume ignorance of Bolanath's absence and deliver her message to him, to his wife, and at the same time watch what Bukshish Alle did and said.

The jailor—from long practice—was not one who easily forgot faces and on seeing Gunga approaching him he at once remembered her as one who had been under his charge in jail, and the more particularly because she had interested the wife of the magistrate, who, it had even been whispered, had ventured to mention to her husband (Major Gordon) how much poor Gunga was to be pitied, and how cruelly she had been used and deceived, and it was currently believed that through this interest Gunga (who had no means of bribing the court officials) had escaped the punishment she had laid herself open to. When Gunga and Bukshish Alle met a few paces in front of Bolanath's house the former stood in a respectful position covering—as is the custom with native women in her position of life—the greater part of her face and head with her cloth or "Chaddar."

"What are you doing here at this early hour, Gunga?" was Bukshish Alle's remark as she made him the usual

"Salaam," which the jailor returned. "I have heard that you are so fortunate as to be the trusted servant of the Rane Sahiba, and that your fortunes have greatly changed for the better since the last time we met, when, as you must remember, you were under my charge in the jail. You will, I know, do me the justice to acknowledge that I always treated you as kindly and considerately as my duty would allow of?"

Gunga replied:—"Darogha Sahib, what you assert is quite true and I have nothing to complain of while in jail, and I have no doubt but that the small sum my old aunt paid you—only the usual 'dusturi'—was conducive in some degree to the leniency with which I was treated. But perhaps you do not remember this, these are such trifles that they would hardly find a place in your memory after so long a period. But you really did behave well to me after it became known that the Zilla Sahib's Mĕm Sahib took an interest in your humble servant, and then you even went so far as to transgress the jail rules, and sent me a lota of fresh milk and a chelem of tobacco. But never mind all that now. You ask me why I am here Darogha Sahib. It is quite possible I may have come with the same purpose as yourself, to speak with Bolanath Teware." The last was cunningly put on Gunga's part so as to get Bukshish Alle to believe she was quite ignorant of Bolanath's misfortune. "I have a message to him from my mistress which I must deliver; but what do you want with him?"

Bukshish Alle thought to himself: "This is an opportunity sent by Providence; I see a way in which I can now not only secure my 2,000 rupees from Bolanath, but also ingratiate myself with the Rane by playing into her hands, and as matters tend at present it would be wise to have the Rane as a friend, as she is likely soon to be in power. Having formed his plans he said:—

"Sister Gunga, there is no reason why we should not become fast friends and eventually benefit each other. I will take you into my confidence if you will agree to be my friend

and keep faith with me. Can I depend on this?" Gunga cunningly at first appeared to hesitate, but finally consented and said:—"Very well Darogha Sahib, let it be as you desire. You say it is to the interest of both of us we should act together. I am willing to do so; and now tell me your plans, and first of all why you are here at so unusual an hour in the morning?"

Bukshish Alle replied:—"Of course you are not aware that the Zilla Sahib has made Bolanath a prisoner? But such is the case, and he is charged with attempting to poison the Europeans at the dinner given by your mistress. I imagine this piece of news will rather astonish you, and what is more, he accuses the Rane of complicity with him in his attempt; and now, knowing as you do the kindness of my disposition, you can have no difficulty in accounting for my presence here. I have come—at Bolanath's request—to break the tidings to his wife, who poor woman, must be in great anxiety regarding her husband. And now Gunga that you have had my confidence, in return give me yours and tell me what message you bring to Bolanath from Rane Luchme Bhie?"

Gunga saw she must be cautious, having so wily a person to deal with as the jailor of Ranepore, and so replied shortly:—"I have only come to tell Bolanath that the Rane wishes to see him, but I cannot now deliver my message, and must return at once and convey the information I have just had given me to her. But Darogha Sahib, perhaps you would not object to come and give it yourself, it would be satisfactory; will you do so? It is quite possible the Rane may wish to do something in the matter in which you can assist her."

"Yes Gunga," said the jailor, "in an hour or so expect me at the palace, but I must go in disguise as it would not do for the Sahibs to know that I have been visiting the Rane, and it might come to their ears. You had better return at once, and tell her I will be with her shortly. I shall come in the dress

of a 'Fakir' and shall ask for alms, and you can let me into her presence, so be on the look out for me. I will now go and give Bolanath's message to his wife."

Saying this Bukshish Alle entered the house and Gunga turned homewards and slowly walked away. She had not, however, gone many yards when she stopped, and having ascertained that Bukshish Alle had entered Bolanath's house and that she was unobserved, she retraced her steps at a run and easily concealed herself just below the window of the reception room, under the shady branches of a lime tree, and there awaited to hear what Bukshish Alle had really to communicate to Mussumbat Becka, for Gunga knew his nature too well to believe he had paid his visit with the philanthropic intention of relieving Bolanath's wife's mind from anxiety regarding her husband.

She had not to wait long, the jailor was speaking and saying:—"I need hardly tell you Becka that your husband's liberty and even his life, not to say anything about his personal comfort while in jail, depend on your producing the 2,000 rupees mentioned in the note I have just presented to you from him. The matter is in your hands, escape and liberty on the one hand, and torture and the disgraceful death by hanging on the other—which latter, according to your religion would exclude your husband from 'Behesht,' from loss of caste caused by the touch of the hangman, who is always a low 'Parriah or Dhir.' But, Becka, you must be quick and decide, for I cannot remain here more than a few minutes, for I have other important business to attend to."

Though Becka—Bolanath's wife—was not a woman possessing any great amount of the milk of human kindness, she had this merit that she was attached to her husband, and she well knew that his death would be ruin to herself and children so she decided on complying with the jailor's demand and said:—"Darogha Sahib, if you will wait my return I will bring you the money. I know where this amount is hid, for my husband never trusts bankers but

buries his money in different places, and with one of these hiding places he has made me acquainted in case of emergencies like that which has now occurred."

Becka then disappeared into the interior of the straggling old building Bolanath called his house, which was so formed that escape from it without being seen from more than one door was practicable.

Gunga, who had listened attentively, thought to herself: "My friend Bukshish Alle, I have rightly appreciated your motives, and you will find me one too many for you; but I wonder what you intend doing? I do not think you would really dare to let Bolanath escape, as, if the Sahibs found out that you had done so, they might hang you instead of him and they are still powerful. No, no, from what I know of you, I think your plan is to keep Bolanath as well as his 2,000 rupees. Now I must get away before you come out, but it will go hard but that I shall manage to find out what your wicked plans are, and what your arrangements with my mistress will tend to. It will be a regular case of 'Diamond cut Diamond' between you two."

As these thoughts passed through Gunga's mind she stepped quickly and quietly out of her hiding place, and giving one more stealthy glance over her shoulder to see that the jailor was not observing her through the window, she went off at her best pace back to the palace, and at once entered her mistress's room, whom she found impatiently expecting her return.

"Well Gunga," exclaimed the Rane, "what of Bolanath? have you seen him and given him my message, why have you not brought him with you?"

Gunga making a respectful obeisance said:—"My respected mistress, for the very good reason that Bolanath is hard and fast in the Ranepore jail."

In her excitement on hearing this the Rane sprang up from the couch on which she had been reclining and said:—"Explain quickly girl, tell me all you know. What is he

accused of, and by whom? If the Sahibs know all the matter cannot stop there. I must either fly or declare myself their enemy; gather my friends around me and make the best fight I can, but things are not ripe for that yet. Gunga, why do you not speak?"

Gunga feeling inwardly much gratified at having so disturbed the mind of her generally imperturbable mistress, though she showed no outward signs of satisfaction, hastened to reply:—"I can only tell you what Bukshish Alle the jailor told me, the truth of which I am not prepared to vouch for, and which is that Bolanath was arrested last night or rather this morning for attempting to poison the Sahibs and Mēm Sahibs, and that he has stated that you had urged him to do so. This is of course ridiculous, and has only been invented by Bolanath to screen himself. I thought, however, that under the circumstances it would be as well that you should see Bukshish Alle yourself, so I have told him to come here, which he has agreed to do in disguise as a 'Fakir.' He met me at Bolanath's house, where he had gone to inform his wife of her husband's misfortunes; and I overheard him promise to let Bolanath escape if she paid him 2,000 rupees, which she agreed to do and I have no doubt has done by this time!

"This I overheard after I had parted with the jailor, and he does not know that I am aware of his real motive for visiting Becka, Bolanath's wife. He tried to deceive me by telling me it was pity and commiseration for the poor woman, but I took the liberty of listening under the window to their conversation, as I knew too much of the jailor's ways to believe there was one 'Rutti' of kindness in his hard nature. And now my dear mistress I have told you all I know and have put you on your guard; I hope you approve of what I have done? I would advise you to propose to the jailor—when he comes—that he should allow Bolanath to escape, but that he should let you know when this occurs, and you could then have him seized and brought to you without the Sahibs

knowing anything about it; and you could yourself punish the detestable treacherous rascal and 'Namuk-haran' in a way he richly deserves, for his insolence in connecting your name with his horrid crimes."

The Rane fell into deep thought for a few minutes, and then said:—"You are a clever girl Gunga, and you appear particularly good at hiding and listening. I hope you always do so with as praiseworthy an object as in the present instance. I think your suggestions are well worth acting on, but I must first hear what the jailor has to say. You did quite right in telling him to come here, and you deserve something for your shrewdness." Saying this, the Rane took a handsome interwoven silver belt out of a jewel box standing near her, and clasping it round Gunga's waist continued:—"You are a good girl Gunga, I have sometimes felt inclined to mistrust you, but do so no longer; wear this as a mark of my favour and regard. It has the virtue of having been blessed by a holy Biragee of undoubted sanctity, one who is said even to have the power of communicating with the spirits of those who have passed out of this earth life, and it is supposed to protect the person who wears it from the evil eye and from assassination and disease. And now Gunga, after you have had your morning meal—for I imagine you are fasting—go down to the gate and keep a look out for the jailor and when he comes bring him in here."

Gunga thanked her mistress—though her conscience somewhat pricked her for her deceit—for the handsome present she had received and retired to partake of her food, after which she took up her position at a small loophole or window commanding a view of the road leading up to the palace and waited patiently for Bukshish Alle's arrival.

CHAPTER XVI.

WE left the jailor waiting for the return of Becka, the wife of his prisoner, Bolanath, who had given her promise to produce her husband's ransom money.

After her absence for about a quarter of an hour, she returned, carrying in her hand a large heavy bag, the contents of which—rupees—she emptied out on the floor before the jailor and proceeded to pile them up in little heaps of 10 rupees each; and at last, having completed her task, with a sigh of regret, said:—"Darogha Sahib, please count these for yourself; I think you will find them correct, and that they amount to the sum my unfortunate husband promised you. And now, when may I hope to see him?—though, under present circumstances, he can no longer remain in Ranepore. I must see him and consult his wishes, and, should he desire it, accompany him in his flight."

Bukshish Alle sat down and deliberately counted over the money, weighing on his finger any coin that appeared to him suspiciously light, and having satisfied himself that there were 2,000 rupees, he replaced them in the bag, which he covered over with his handkerchief that it might not be seen and, placing it on his shoulder preparatory to leaving, he turned to Becka, and said:—

"In a delicate affair of this nature you must be aware things cannot be done in a hurry; I must arrange matters so as to avoid being suspected of connivance at the escape of your husband, and also make arrangements for his being able to get away to Cawnpore or Gwalior; for should he be caught,

he would at once turn round on me and say I had allowed him to break jail—I well know his cowardly nature—and then I should not only lose my situation, but perhaps, under present circumstances, my life also. So be patient, my sister, and depend upon it all will go well with you."

Saying this, Bukshish Alle walked quickly out of the house and made his way to his own residence, where, having deposited the money in a safe place, he commenced disguising himself in the garb of a mendicant, and, having smeared himself over with ashes, painted his forehead and nose with bright stripes of yellow ochre, and whitened his eye-brows with chalk. Thus disfigured and disguised he proceeded to the palace of the Rane, and having arrived there, he pulled up in front of the "Durban" or door-keeper and asked for alms in the customary half insolent half servile drawl of the wandering Fakir, saying:—"In the name of God help his servant, and the blessings of plenty and prosperity will fall on your head like the last heavy showers of the 'Bursat.' If you refuse to do so, may the curse of the only true Prophet rest on you and yours."

The watchman or door-keeper did not appear to attach much importance to either the promise of good or threat of evil. It is probable he was well accustomed to similar addresses, or perhaps had but little faith in the fulfilment of such predictions. At any rate, he went on smoking his Huqua and taking no notice of the pretended Fakir; but Gunga, who as we have before stated, was on the look out for the jailor's arrival, had seen him approaching and coming to the door, advanced towards him, and said:—"Holy Fakir, though I am a Hindoo and you a follower of the Prophet, a blessing from you will do me no harm; if you will step inside I will bestow on you what little I have to spare." Then turning to the Durban, she said —"Alli Murad, let the Fakir pass; I will be answerable should fault be found with you for doing so."

Alli Murad knew well the confidential position held by

Gunga and at once assented to her request; and Bukshish Alle followed Gunga, who led him to the presence of the Rane, her mistress.

It was not the first time the Rane and the jail Darogha had met or had had transactions together connected with followers or friends of the former, in which the well-known corruptibility of the jail authorities had been taken advantage of to further the views of the Rane; and alas! in many instances to successfully frustrate the ends of justice; so there was no great difficulty in opening the conversation. Luchme Bhie commenced it by saying:—"My old friend, I have been informed by my faithful servant Gunga—who has just admitted you here—that one of my vakiels, Bolanath, has got into trouble and is in jail on the charge of poisoning the European community and, wonderful to say, has had the audacity to accuse me of complicity with him in his crime. It is hardly necessary to say that such a charge is simply ridiculous; but, for the sake of argument, even allowing it to be true, I should like to know where the proof is to come from? It is not likely I should be condemned on the simple word of a 'Budmash' such as Bolanath."

Gunga's thoughts—though she did not express them—were to the effect that perhaps the proof was nearer to the Rane than she suspected. The Rane continued:—

"You know, Bukshish Alle, you and I have always managed our little businesses to our mutual satisfaction and I see no reason why this should not also be the case now. Gunga suggests that you might possibly be induced to let Bolanath escape and I have no doubt but that in doing so you would be actuated by praiseworthy feelings of pity for his poor wife and children, who are dependent on him for support." Here the Rane indulged in a sarcastic smile, and continued:—"I have no wish to interfere with or thwart your plans, all I want you to do is to let me know the day and hour of his escape, as I would like to have an interview with him, and as he might have some delicacy in coming

to me of his own free will, I would arrange to have him brought forcibly to me. It is not necessary for me to tell you that every arrangement for his comfort would be made. Do you quite understand me Darogha Sahib?" Bukshish Alle replied that "he thought he quite understood what was wanted of him."

The Rane then said:—"Now I do not ask you to do anything for me for nothing, that is not my custom, the day you comply with my wishes I will pay you whatever you demand, that is to say if your request is in any way reasonable, and you know of old how you can trust me."

"On consideration I have no fear that the Sahibs will proceed against me, even if they believe Bolanath, for it is to their interest to keep things as quiet as they can; nor do we desire to pluck the 'mango' before it is ripe, or in plain words to precipitate matters before the proper time has come, which, thanks to Bhawani, is now not far off."

As the Rane finished speaking a servant entered the room and having salaamed to her presented a letter, saying:—"This has just been brought by a 'sawar' from the Zilla Sahib, Major Gordon."

On the servant retiring, the Rane eagerly severed the golden thread with which the khareta was bound, and breaking the seal she handed it to Bukshish Alle saying:—"Perhaps you will read this for me, Bolanath generally conducts my correspondence with the Sahibs. I cannot read Persian, and I feel I can trust you." The jailor read the letter aloud. It was the one with which the reader is already acquainted, written at the request of Colonel McLeod by Major Gordon concerning Bolanath's imprisonment.

Having heard the contents the Rane's face brightened up, and she said:—"I thought they would not dare to break with me just at present at any rate. I will answer this shortly, but we must settle our affairs first my friend, and I would now like to know if you are willing to fall into my views Bukshish Alle?"

The jailor replied in the affirmative, and the Rane continued:—"Then how long do you require to make arrangements to deliver over that 'Namuk-haram' Bolanath to my care, and how do you propose to prevent the Sahibs knowing what has become of him when in my hands?"

Bukshish Alle replied:—"I have formed a plan which I hope will have your approval. It is as follows":—

Here the Rane interrupted him saying:—"I think as we have a good deal to say to each other it would be more comfortable if we were to sit down. Gunga, bring a cushion and tell one of the kidmutghars to bring sherbet and a huquah for the Darogha Sahib; but stay, bring it in yourself, it might be thought curious if a Fakir was seen sitting with me alone."

Gunga went away to do as she was directed, and Bukshish Alle, at the request of the Rane, reclined on the soft cushion at his ease but observed, while Gunga was absent, "Do you think Gunga is to be entirely trusted, Rane Sahiba? I ask this because I hear she has been seen sometimes to visit the Zilla Sahib's Mēm Sahib, and I hardly like saying all I have to say before her." The Rane answered:—"Such may have been the case, but I believe she only went there to show her gratitude for the kindness and interest that was taken in her trial for concealing the birth of her child. I have myself sometimes suspected her, but of late I have been convinced that I did so without any good cause, besides which, fear alone of the consequences would keep her straight." Here Gunga returned bringing a glass, huquah, and a jug of sherbet made from the juice of the pomegranate and placed them before the jailor, who, quite at his ease, commenced complacently to smoke and sip the refreshing beverage brought him and at intervals, as he did so, delivered himself as follows:—

"Rane Sahiba, you must know that the situation of a jail Darogha under the Sirkar Bahādur is anything but a bed of roses, and nobody of intelligence or any degree of shrewdness would consent to hold the office for the mere pittance, the pay

given by the Sirkar. The perquisites no doubt are large and worth having, but then it requires great caution and foresight to secure them without being found out by the Sahibs, and not only turned out of employment, but probably imprisoned in one's own jail. It is true this has never been the case with me. God has protected me, but Major Gordon is not a person to be trifled with, or in whose eyes dust is easily thrown. He appears to know everything that goes on, and sometimes I am inclined to think that he obtains such information through the means of his wife, who you know is a native, and comes from one of the hill tribes said to possess the power of communicating with the unseen world. However that may be, I am obliged to watch him closely. As for McBean Sahib who has the immediate charge of the jail, he is quite of a different stamp, and I have no fear of him. He is young and not acquainted with all the ins and outs pertaining to the management of a jail.

"On two occasions Gordon Sahib—in his opinion—convicted me of misconduct, having charged me with letting a Baniah of the name of Herechand—who was in jail for forgery—visit his wife at night in the city of Ranepore; he sentenced me to be dismissed, and also imposed a fine, and that a very heavy one too; and on another occasion he found some of the prisoners who had been sentenced to hard labour in the department of the jail for non-labouring prisoners, and he chose to think I had favoured them, and had received a bribe to treat them leniently, and so he again dismissed me. On both these occasions I appealed to the Commissioner Sahib, Colonel McLeod, and he very justly reversed the magistrate's order, and so I remained jailor of Ranepore. But you may judge from what I have told you that there is no love lost between Gordon Sahib and your slave. If ever I have a chance I will not fail to make him eat dirt.

"For any jailor to hold office under the Sirkar Angraze, he must have all his subordinates, the deputy jailor, the burkindazes and turnkeys in his interest, or he would be unable

to retain his berth for a day, and to do this, Rane Sahiba, he must of course share to a certain extent his perquisites with them, so that after all he does not get anything like what he should do.

"I only mention this to show you that though your slave gets the credit of receiving large sums of money from relations of prisoners to induce him to allow certain indulgences, such as tobacco, milk, sugar, and in some instances opium and 'Bhang'—for the latter two high remuneration is always given—and such like luxuries yet not more than half remains in your servant's hands. I am so fortunate as to be a favourite with the Commissioner Sahib, otherwise I should long ago have been turned adrift. I often go to that gentleman's house and play with and amuse his children, make my salaams to the Mēm Sahib and present her with a Daolié of fruit and flowers with sugar candy and Batasas for the 'Baba log.' I tip the orderly Chaprasses freely, make presents to the servants, particularly to the Ayah, and so ingratiate myself. I tried this on with Gordon Sahib, but it would not do, he is much too sharp to allow it, and his Mēm Sahib being a native sees through every thing, so I gave it up as useless.

"So Rane Sahiba, I make hay while the sun shines, knowing that my tenure of office cannot in all probability last very long, for indeed I have never heard of a jailor holding his appointment for more than a few years and during that time if he is a wise man he should have provided for himself for the remainder of his days. Now you see why your slave is obliged to insist on having liberal payment for his services from those who may be so unfortunate as to require them. It is fate! I am obliged to be exacting."

Luchme Bhie listened attentively, well knowing to what all these confidential communications tended, and that she was to understand that the service she desired was not to be given for nothing, but having made up her mind to pay well—for, to her, revenge on her ungrateful servant was at that

moment what she most desired on earth—she said:—"I quite understand Darogha Sahib how you are situated, but now let us come to business. What sum do you demand to so arrange matters that Bolanath may be handed over to me on his leaving the jail, and that without its being known where he is or what has become of him except to those we can trust?"

"Respected Lady," replied the jailor, "I was just about telling you when you began to speak; well, my plan is that in about a week hence I shall let Bolanath escape, and he shall then fall into your hands. He is imprisoned in a ward situated near the outer wall of the jail from which there has been excavated a passage, first down below the depth of the wall of the jail, then horizontally under the wall outwards for some ten paces, and all that remains now to be done is to dig up to the surface and so escape from the jail. The top of the opening leading from the ward down into this passage is covered over with slabs or stone flags, on which Bolanath sleeps, having little idea that such a way of escape is in existence and so conveniently near him. You will perhaps think it odd this passage should have been made, and how it came to exist. I will tell you:—

"About a year ago a very wealthy banker was imprisoned, under trial, being suspected of having poisoned his wife whom he believed to have been on much too intimate terms with his cashier. The proof was conclusive, and there was but little doubt in any one's mind but that the banker—influential as he was—would, if matters took their course, be hanged. For such is the justice of the laws of the Sirkar Angraze, that a man cannot even poison his own wife who has dishonoured him without suffering punishment." Here the eyes of the jailor sparkled somewhat with hidden humour and the Rane and even Gunga condescended to smile. The banker's name was Bapoo Row, he was of a good Maharatta family, and had wealthy relations in Gwalior, where you know dear lady the code of morals is not of the strictest. These relations communicated with me and at once agreed to pay me well—

which in all honesty I must say they did—if I would connive at Bapoo Row's escape. So I supplied him with a couple of iron spuds or 'Curpees' and a basket, and also confined one of his own servants in the same ward with himself, this servant being also in jail on the charge of assisting his master in getting rid of his wife. Master and servant worked at night when all was quiet and they were locked in by themselves by the light of a small lamp with which I supplied them, until they had formed the passage I have described to you. Every morning they scattered the gravel they had dug out in the night over the yards and other parts of the jail. But they were only to have made use of this passage and escape through it as a last resource—this I had insisted on—in case they were convicted; but in the meantime large sums of money were spent in bribing the different witnesses and the judicial 'Omla' and particularly the Sherestadar Fize Alli—were all paid, so that when the trial came off Bapoo Row was acquitted and left jail in triumph, accompanied by his friends and relations, mounted on an elephant and escorted by a band of native musicians—hired for the purpose of celebrating the happy occasion—and the result was, that the subterranean passage was not required. But I thought it might as well remain—now that it had been dug—as it might serve for some other occasion. It is perfectly impossible to discover it except by raising the stone flag which covers the entrance to it, and no one knows of its existence but one or two trustworthy men. I have been most careful that the deputy jailor—whom I do not trust—should be kept in ignorance!

"Now what I propose is that Bolanath be permitted to escape through this passage. It will of course be imagined that he dug the hole himself, and though I may be found fault with for not discovering it, I shall escape punishment as there will be no proof against me—and the Sahibs never punish without that. This, of course, you will see cannot take place until a proper time has elapsed in which it would be possible

for Bolanath to excavate the hole—say about a week or ten days. I will give you notice of the day and hour and you can have some one on the watch to seize him when he comes out; and now Rane Sahiba, what do you think of your slave's plan?"

"You could not have devised a better one in my opinion, or one that would suit all parties concerned so well; but how much am I to pay you, Darogha Sahib, for all this?"

"Well," replied the jailor, "would you think 2,000 rupees too much, one thousand down and the other thousand when Bolanath is in your hands?"

"I agree" said Luchme Bhie, and saying so she took up a pen and wrote an order on her banker for 1,000 rupees, adding: "Gunga will draw this and hand it over to you, it would not do for it to be known that I had paid you money. She will accompany you to Akia Mul's shop and draw it—for convenience sake—in gold 'muhurs,' which can be easily concealed and carried. Akai Mul is accustomed to pay her large sums for me, so by this arrangement we shall avoid suspicion. But stay a moment Bukshish Alle, I would like to know before you go what assistance are we likely to get from the jail Burkindazes when the good and auspicious day arrives and the troops mutiny and turn against the 'Faringees?' Can you rely on them?"

"I can answer for all the Mahomedans, and for many of the Hindoos, but the assistant jailor Hera Lal was appointed by Gordon Sahib as a check on me, and he has followers among the Hindoos who are not much to be relied on; but when the time comes I hope they also will have discovered what is good for them and will join the others. And now Gunga, my sister, if you will—with the Rane Sahiba's permission—come with me to the banker's, I am ready to go," and, making a low salaam to the Rane, Bukshish Alle took his departure followed after a short interval by Gunga.

As he passed out the Durban Alli Murad muttered to himself:—"My friend you have been a long time in the palace for a Fakir, I can see more perhaps than I am given

credit for and it strikes me very forcibly that I have seen the holy Fakir before, but it's none of my business to be prying into palace secrets; if, however, I was asked to say who the holy man really was, I should say he had a striking resemblance to Bukshish Alle, the jail Darogha, and now I observe he is followed by that little Jesabel Gunga who—if all that is said of her is true—is better as a friend than an enemy, as she possesses the ear of that she-devil Luchme Bhie. Well, when they want my services they know where to find me, and they might employ a less trustworthy person—though I say it that should not—than Alli Murad, the Durban."

Alli Murad belonged to a class of men who picked up a precarious living by serving any one who paid them; he was entirely indifferent as to the nature of the service demanded of him and would think as little of cutting a throat—if well remunerated for his trouble—as he would have of preparing and eating his mid-day meal of dhal and chapatees, and then curling himself up in his kumble—or blanket—to sleep off the effects of the gorging he had subjected himself to, as was his daily custom.

At present he held the post of door-keeper to the Rane's palace, jointly with another similarly disposed ruffian of the name of Junki Pursad, a Hindoo. They took turn and turn about in watching, and relieved each other at fixed periods of time, one always being present. They had been selected by the Rane as tried men who—always being conveniently near—could with confidence be employed by her when necessary, however desperate or disreputable the service required of them might be.

When Gunga had gone out of sight of Alli Murad she quickened her pace and passed the jailor, saying to him as she did so:—"Remain at the 'Bowlie' at the corner of the street leading to Akia Mul's shop, and I will bring the money to you there."

On her arriving at the banker's house—attached to which was his shop—she found the worthy man himself sitting

cross-legged in his verandah, surrounded with piles of coins of different kinds—gold, silver, and copper. He recognised Gunga at once and said—"Well my sister, what can I do for you to-day?" Gunga made no verbal reply, but presented the Rane's cheque and pointed to a pile of gold muhurs, implying she should like to have her cheque cashed in gold.

The banker scrutinised the document and finding it to bear the signature and seal of the Rane he counted out the sum demanded in gold muhurs, and placed them in a small bag, sealed them up, and gave them to Gunga, saying:—"I think you had better have one of my 'Sepahees' to accompany you to the palace; these are troublesome times, 'Budmashee' is rampant, and even in daylight you may be robbed and murdered before you get home."

This however would not suit Gunga, who declined the escort saying:—"I have no fear Akia Mul, God protects the innocent and will take care of me."

As Gunga passed the jailor on her way back to the palace she placed the bag of gold in his hands saying:—"I am always to be found if you should wish to communicate with the Rane Sahiba—ask for me at the palace gate. This will be the safest plan, it would be dangerous for you to be seen with her; but a message to me will bring me to this spot or any other you may appoint for a meeting." They then parted taking different ways, Gunga to the palace, and the Darogha to the jail.

CHAPTER XVII.

A WEEK had passed since the events narrated in the last chapter had occurred, and during that time Gunga had not failed to find opportunities of communicating with her friend Elsie, and informing her of the Rane's and the jailor's plans in connection with the proposed escape of Bolanath from jail.

This information had been naturally passed on to Gordon by his wife, and he had—as in duty he was bound—told Colonel McLeod of the conspiracy to permit Bolanath to escape, in order that he might fall into the power of his late vindictive mistress, the Rane.

It was about eight o'clock in the morning that McLeod and his subordinate Gordon were sitting in the open verandah of the house of the former, considering how they should act under the circumstances, for Gunga had just informed Elsie that it had been arranged that Bolanath should be permitted to break jail that very night.

McLeod was speaking and saying:—"I have thought over the matter Gordon well, and am fully convinced that we should let events take their own course and feign ignorance of what is going on. There is no news of troops coming from England, at any rate none has reached us, and our object should be to keep off a general rising until we are strong enough to grapple with circumstances and act with vigour. By all means let our fat friend Bolanath fall into the hands of his enemy. I have little doubt but that if he does, he will get his deserts.

I held a high opinion of Bukshish Alle until lately, and am sorry to hear he is so great a scoundrel; but his turn will come and punishment overtake him some day. I only regret I did not let your orders regarding him stand good, but regrets are now useless. He appears to have the whole jail establishment (except the deputy jailor Hera-Lal, and one or two others) under his thumb. I think, however, you should manage to have some one you can rely upon to see that Bolanath does not really escape altogether. It will probably be difficult to get any one worthy of trust I fear. We shall, however, of course hear through Gunga what occurs; so taking all things into consideration, I think 'masterly inactivity' should be our motto for the present. What do you say, do you agree with me?"

"Quite, and in every respect," replied Gordon, "and very opportunely—as it happens—old Unto Shikare and his two sons, Puggo and Buggo—fine strong young fellows—are now in Ranepore, having brought in several tiger and panther skins to claim the reward paid for their destruction. I know they are to be trusted thoroughly, and are worth a dozen of our wavering officials. I will take them into my confidence, if you approve, and put them to watch what happens to Bolanath, with orders that should he really succeed in making off for Cawnpore or Gwalior—which I have little doubt but that he intends doing—they are to seize him and await my orders.

"Perhaps you may not have heard of Unto the Gonde Shikare, but you may remember the incident of Shakespear's accident, when tiger shooting, which terminated so unfortunately in his being obliged to leave India? 'Unto' is the man who shot the man-eating tigress with Shakespear's rifle while Shakespear lay stunned, insensible, and perfectly helpless on the ground, and quite at the mercy of 'Stripes.'"

"Yes," remarked McLeod, "I well remember the circumstance you refer to, and how well the Shikare behaved, and so Unto is that Shikare, I had quite forgotten his name if I

ever heard it? Of course I leave choice of instruments to you, the truthful nature of the Gonde is in my estimation as good a guarantee as we can have in a case of this kind, surrounded by treachery as we evidently are."

Just as McLeod finished speaking there was a rustle of a lady's dress heard at the door leading from the house into the verandah, and Mrs. McLeod walked in, and shaking Gordon (who rose to receive her) cordially by the hand she said, with some hesitation :—

"Major Gordon, my ayah told me you were here, and my anxiety must plead my excuse for venturing to intrude on what I imagine must be a consultation (between you and my husband) of moment and importance. I have come purposely to speak to you regarding what my husband has been advising me to do, and that is to leave Ranepore and go and seek safety elsewhere, by placing myself under the protection of the Rajah of Orcha, in whose loyalty and kindness he places unbounded confidence. I cannot however bear the thought of separation from him—for I do not hide from myself that we may never meet again, though I unhesitatingly allow that women and children would be greatly in the way should affairs take a more decided and tragical turn, and should the Rane declare openly against us. Do you think the other ladies would accompany me? I would never go by myself; but if I thought my example was necessary, and that it would be for the good of all that they should go, I would not hesitate, for I know how great an incumbrance women and children would be should it become necessary either to oppose force by force, or to escape to some place of safety through a country in open rebellion. And then again the children are to be considered, poor little creatures, they could not survive exposure at this time of the year. My own wishes and feelings lead me to remain, but I am ready to sacrifice them on the altar of duty if it is really thought necessary for the safety and good of others."

It was with some hesitation Gordon replied, for he himself

was wavering between two opinions. He knew how difficult it would be to protect a large body of females and children in case of flight through a country thirsting for their blood, should they remain for the present, and eventually be obliged to seek safety in flight, while on the other hand he had really not the confidence which McLeod appeared to have in the Orcha Chief, with whom he proposed trusting all that he most loved and valued on earth. After a pause of some moments, turning to McLeod, he said :—

"You know how difficult it is for me to advise in a matter of this nature, the more particularly as my opinion is rather opposed to that which you hold. I do not feel that confidence in either the power or integrity of the Chief of Orcha which you possess, for should the whole country rise against us (and at present it looks very likely that such will be the case) if his intentions are good and true, his retainers, even if they remained faithful to their chief, would soon be overpowered and overwhelmed. Pardon my being so candid, but it is clearly my duty to speak out and say what I believe to be the truth, with such precious interests at stake as not only the lives but the honour of those we are bound to protect.

"My advice is that we take possession of the Fort, which is as you know almost impregnable, indeed I may say it is quite so, except to breeching guns, which the rebels are not likely to have or to be able to procure. We can count in all on about fifty male Europeans and Eurasians, armed with either English rifles or double-barrelled guns, a formidable little band when driven to fight for the lives of all they hold most precious, behind the strong walls of the Fort too, in my opinion invincible to the force likely to be brought against it.

"At present the Fort is not provisioned, and there would be perhaps some difficulty in conveying provisions into it without creating suspicion, but it is a difficulty I hope to overcome, and indeed for some days I have had sacks of grain taken in there at night by the Tuhseldar, whom I believe

I can trust. You know 'Ahmud Hassain,' and what a high character he bears. He is one of the few—though a Mussulman—whom I believe is heart and hand in our interest.

"If we can only get enough provisions into the Fort (the bulk of the treasure, as you know, is always kept there under a native guard) and ourselves safely within its walls and the massive iron-bound doors closed between us and our enemies, we can, I am convinced, defy anything that can be brought against us until help comes from Bombay or Calcutta. It would be indeed odd if we could not make it too hot for any approaching our stronghold with the intention of escalading, with our guns and rifles. I shall, with your permission and the help of 'Ahmud Hassain' push on the provisioning of the fort with grain, and if matters grow worse we shall at any rate have a safe refuge at hand for the women and children.

"My advice is to let us keep together, trust in God and ourselves, and to no native whatever; nor indeed, if it becomes necessary to take to the Fort, would I have any natives in it with us except perhaps a few domestic servants. For should they turn against us we could easily deal with them. You see I have taken all eventualities into consideration as it behoves I should under such circumstances as we are placed in. I have now given my opinion freely and unreservedly. I may be wrong, but if my advice is adopted, we shall at any rate be able to die fighting, and not be taken like mice caught in a trap."

Gordon's bold language gave courage to his companions, and after some discussion his plans were adopted, and Colonel McLeod expressed his determination to place them before the military authorities and solicit their concurrence and co-operation.

Mrs. McLeod felt as if a weight had been removed from her head, and looking her thanks to Gordon said:—"You have greatly relieved my mind, for night and day have I been thinking and thinking of what was my duty, and whether it was consistent with it to part from my husband, and so set

an example to the other ladies to leave Ranepore. To do so would be most repugnant to my feelings as a wife, but had it been proved clearly and satisfactorily to me that it was my duty, I trust I should have hesitated no longer. Now with my husband I feel I have courage, and am capable of facing and meeting danger and even death as a woman should, and I feel gratitude and joy at the decision which has been come to on this momentous subject."

As Gordon was entering his kuchery that morning after the interview with McLeod and his wife, which we have described, he saw standing under the shade of a Burgot tree old "Unto" the Shikare, and his two sons. Unto held a petition in his hand, and before him lay a pile of tiger and panther skins which he had brought in from the jungle for the usual reward, and the petition (for the writing of which he had paid a rupee to a hatchet-faced, close-shaven, yellow-visaged Mohurur or professed petition writer) he held up on seeing Gordon, in hopes of attracting his attention.

Before, however, Gordon could sign to him to come forward—which was his wish to do—an obsequious Chaprasse, by name Kullo, who happened to be standing near poor Unto, and did not observe Gordon, snatched the petition from him, and gave him a push that sent him staggering over his pile of skins, and he eventually landed on his hands and knees on the opposite side of them; at the same time the Chaprasse called out—

"Harumzada, don't you know that this is not the time for presenting petitions, when the 'Huzoor' gives notice that it is his pleasure to receive urgees from such as you at the close of the day, it will be quite time enough for you to presume to bring your petition to notice."

It was not the first time Unto had found himself exposed to similar treatment, and being a good tempered fellow and in no way quarrelsome, he picked himself up, and humbly asked that his petition might be returned to him.

The Chaprasse, however, did not appear inclined to comply

with his request, and said, glancing at the bundle of skins lying near :—

"How much do you expect to receive as a reward for these?"

Unto replied :—"There are two tiger, three tendwas, two hyenas, and a bear skin, and it has taken me and my sons a whole year's hard work to get them. Whatever the 'Sahib' thinks right he will give us, and we shall be thankful."

"You do not evidently know your business friend Shikare," said the Chaprasse, "and you want, sadly, some one of experience to pilot you through the shoals and difficulties of kuchery proceedure, and if there is any man on this earth more capable of assisting you than myself I will agree to eat any amount of dirt you please. My name is 'Kullo,' and my duty is to make myself generally useful to strangers by day, and to do whatever suits me best at night; indeed I mostly spend the greater part of my spare time in lounging from one Baniah's shop to another, with an occasional visit to the 'Madad Khana' to discuss the passing events of the day, for this I receive from the 'Sirkar' the liberal sum monthly of three rupees. I see on looking attentively at your petition that your name is Unto, and that you are a Gonde by caste (if you can call a Gonde any caste at all), for it is headed : 'The humble petition of Unto Gonde Shikare.'

"Now Unto, as I said before, I am just the man you want and am willing to help you—of course for a consideration. For your two tiger skins you are (by the Sirkar's regulations) entitled to twenty rupees each, for the tendwas or panthers ten each, and for an old luckerbugger or hyena, if a female, five, if a male two-and-a-half; and for 'Balo' the bear four, altogether about eighty rupees—quite a fortune to a jungly fellow like you. Now if you will give me say twenty rupees of this—and that is not much to ask for my services and good will—I will see you through the business, and get your petition presented and passed by the Sahib—with whom I

am a special favourite—and will also take care that no one loots you when you get your money paid from the Treasury. What do you say to my proposal, do you agree to it Unto? I really cannot see that you can do better."

Kullo had just finished his speech, and was congratulating himself on coming across so paying a speculation, and so easy a prey as poor Unto and his sons, when he was somewhat startled by feeling a heavy hand from behind grasp him by the shoulder, and on turning round he saw—much to his disquietude—Major Gordon half concealed by the trunk of the tree under which they were standing.

"Take this 'Harān Zada' into 'Howalālt'" said Gordon, addressing a police constable who happened to be passing, "and tell the Captain Sahib, the District Superintendent of Police, to send him up for trial for extorting money on false pretences from this poor Shikare, or rather attempting to do so."

To account for Gordon's presence we must explain that seeing Unto holding up his petition and wishing to communicate with him, instead of entering his office—as Kullo had imagined—he had quietly stepped round unobserved to where "Unto" and "Kullo" were standing and had overheard their conversation. Kullo—disengaging himself from the grasp of the policeman—who had on receiving Gordon's order seized him by the arm, threw himself on the ground at Gordon's feet, which he clasped, and in the usual whining tone of his class began asking for pardon and forgiveness, saying:—"Oh protector of the poor and nourisher of the needy and fatherless, forgive your poor and humble slave, who being pressed by hunger and the necessity of providing for his wife and children committed the fault with which he is charged. He will never, never offend again."

Gordon turned away without reply, and Kullo was dragged into confinement gesticulating and imploring for mercy in a most heart-rending manner, but with no result. Gordon told Unto to follow him into his kuchery, and having taken

his petition he passed an order for payment of the rewards at the Treasury, and sent one of his own orderly chaprasses with Unto, to see that he was in no way molested, and that he received his money without deductions. But just as Unto was leaving Gordon whispered to him:—"Come to my bungalow Unto, at about seven this evening, I want to speak to you, but do not tell any one that you are coming. I will be on the look out for you." Unto made a respectful salaam, and retired to receive the reward of his jungle successes as a slayer of wild animals; and Gordon having directed the "Nazer" to have the skins cut in two, to prevent their again being presented for reward, commenced his usual office work and remained at his kuchery until it was near the time at which he had fixed for his meeting with Unto, and on reaching home he found the honest old fellow with his two sons sitting down waiting his arrival.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON the day referred to in the last chapter Bolanath sat in his cell, anxiously expecting the hour at which he had been told by the jailor he was again to regain his freedom.

He did not quite trust Bukshish Alle. An undefined feeling of suspicion had taken possession of his mind, for he felt confident that self interest alone would keep his Mahomedan friend from playing him false. He also knew that he must at once quit Ranepore, or face the Rane whom he knew too well to trust.

It was about ten o'clock p.m. when Bukshish Alle entered his place of confinement and sitting down upon his hunkers—in the usual native method—said : "Well, my friend, the time has come at last, and before midnight you will be a free man. But, Bolanath, may I inquire, where do you intend going ? the air of Ranepore will hardly suit you, I think ? "

Bolanath had made up his mind to go to Cawnpore, where he had friends and relations among the followers of the Nana of Bitoor, but his natural cunning impressed him with a feeling that it was just as well not to take the jailor more into his confidence than was necessary. Not that he could explain to himself what harm there was in telling the truth in this instance, but simply because he loved lying and deceit—to which he had been accustomed from his earliest childhood—so he replied :—

"Darogha Sahib, you are quite right—as you always are—in your opinion. I do require change of air, and when by

your kindness and liberality I am a free man I intend going—God willing—to Gwalior to reside until better times come. I have friends there who will receive me, and if you will provide me with a good pony, I know my road, and before day breaks I shall be a long way from Ranepore, much too far off for pursuit—even if my escape should be known. And, besides that, I shall take good care to go by a road seldom frequented—a little longer, but safe, Darogha Sahib—and that is the great consideration for both of us at present, for should I be taken it would not, you know, be to your advantage." This last remark of Bolanath was intended to bring to the jailor's mind that their interests were somewhat one and the same, and that his recapture would involve Bukshish Alle in trouble, as he might tell how he had been permitted to escape. He went on to say:—"If you will do me this favour I will pay to your agent in Gwalior the value of the pony, and Darogha, if you would only lend me ten rupees for road expenses you would add much to the many kindnesses you have done me of late and that I shall also be careful to repay."

Bukshish Alle had already made up his mind—as the reader is aware—to betray Bolanath to the Rane, first because he had been paid for so doing and dared not deceive a person of so vindictive a nature, possessing as that lady did the power of avenging any such deceit on his part, and next from a feeling of dislike to Bolanath, who he could easily see would at once turn on him should opportunity offer, and retaliate for the extortion he had practised upon him before consenting to his escape—he also well knew if Bolanath was once delivered into Luchme Bhie's hands he would never leave them alive—he replied:—

"I will willingly lend you the money you ask for," and he handed to Bolanath a bag of rupees, continuing:—"I have already procured you the pony you require, but I had better explain to you how you are to act on escaping."

"I have told a trustworthy man of mine to be at the door of the Bowlie, leading into the palace from outside the city

walls. He will have a pony ready saddled and bridled for your use. On your arrival you must look for him and on seeing him you must say 'are you for God and the people?" He will answer 'for the people and our religion.' You will then know he is the right person, and he will make over the pony to you, and you can mount and ride for your life and may God protect you, you have my best wishes. Here is a lamp and matches, you must remain where you are until you hear 11 strike on the 'Gunta' of the Guard, then proceed down the passage you have helped in digging out and break through the upper coating or crust of turf still remaining and make straight for the entrance to the Bowlie. And now good-bye, I do not intend being in the jail when you escape, as I must pretend I know nothing of the means by which you got out when in the morning I make my report to the Sahib that Bolanath has broken jail, which as jailor I am bound to do." Bukshish Alle then retired leaving Bolanath to his thoughts, which were somewhat to the following effect.

"I do not see why Bukshish Alle should not behave fairly to me, but at the same time I do not trust him, indeed I never did trust anyone but myself; I am glad I have told him I intended going to Gwalior, as he may have arranged that I should be murdered *en route*, (it never entered into Bolanath's mind that so horrible a fate as making him over to the Rane was contemplated), so that nothing might come out of his connivance at my escape. He is quite capable of this, but once on the pony I shall first go a short distance on the Gwalior road and then turn off and get on the Cawnpore one, so that if there is any trap laid for me it will not answer; in the meantime I can do nothing but wait patiently until the time comes for me to act."

The hours passed heavily and seemed very long, as they always do when one wishes them to pass quickly, but at last Bolanath heard the gong sound, and he prepared himself for action. He first lit his lamp, and producing an iron spud from his bedding—where it had been hid—he proceeded to

raise up one of the flat, heavy stone slabs forming the floor of his cell, and having succeeded in doing this he began to descend into a passage or hole dug out underneath the slab. Having crawled down, the spud in one hand and lantern in the other, he proceeded on his way until he came to the end of the passage, where a space had been dug in which he could stand up. This he did and commenced displacing the portion of earth—above his head—which covered the hole or passage the termination of which was some way beyond the walls of the jail. After digging for a quarter of an hour he began to see a glimmering of light, then a star or two appeared, and eventually the hole above his head became arge enough for him to raise himself through it above ground. This he did very cautiously, putting his head out first and looking about him, much to the terror of a poor donkey grazing near, who, greatly to Bolanath's horror, set up a loud trumpeting bray, as he trotted away from what appeared to be an apparition of a man's head coming through the ground—a phenomenon which would have even put the nerves of Balaam's ass to the test had it been the fate of this celebrated though ill-used animal to have been in its place. Bolanath, having satisfied himself that there was really nothing to fear, gently and noiselessly raised himself out of his hole and stood a free man in the open plain which surrounded the jail of which so lately he had been an unwilling occupant.

Then, thinking it would be just as well not to run the risk of being seen by any of the jail sentries placed at intervals on the walls of the jail, but who as a rule passed the greater part of the night in pleasant slumbers, Bolanath stooped down and on all fours began moving off in the direction of the Bowlie, thinking to himself "If I am observed in the darkness, I shall be taken for a 'Luckerbag,' or wolf, or prowling panther, and be given a wide berth."

When well out of sight of the jail he rose up and set off at a quick run and shortly arrived at his wished for destination—the Bowlie. Here he again stopped and looked

cautiously about him. Under the shadow of the bastion on the city wall—which he had now approached—he saw a dark object standing. Surmising rightly that it was the promised man and pony he advanced towards it and said:—"Are you for God and the people?" A voice replied:—"For the people and our religion," and a man leading a strong-made Maharatta pony stepped towards Bolanath and said:—"I see you are the person I expected, mount and ride quickly, and 'Bhagwan' be your guide."

This Bolanath proceeded to do, but in his anxiety to be off he forgot the precaution he had intended taking of first going on the Gwalior road, and at once took that leading to Cawnpore; and his doing so, as the reader will afterwards learn, saved him from being captured by men sent by the Rane, who lay hid on that road to take him.

We must now return to Gordon and his Gonde friends. The reader will perhaps remember we left them together at that gentleman's house where he had asked them to meet him. Gordon first ascertained that no one was within hearing distance of them, and then addressing Unto, he said:—

"I am about to entrust you, Unto, and your two sons with some work I am anxious should be done, and well done too; but you must first promise me on the word of a Gonde, and I know I can trust that—that you will tell no one."

This promise was readily given, and Gordon then explained how Bolanath was circumstanced, and that it had been ascertained through Gunga that he was to be allowed to escape, adding:—

"We know that he has friends in Cawnpore and he will naturally take that road, so you must be a few hundred yards from the Bowlie; take a rope with you, lie down with it stretched across the road, as Bolanath is riding up raise it so that the pony may trip over it, and then rush forward and secure Bolanath. But remember if any of the Rane's people are there and lay hands on him do not interfere. You are

only to act in the event of Bolanath really being likely to escape from them. You shall not lack a good reward if you carry out my orders, and if it turns out that you take him, tie him hand and foot and keep him in hiding until you can communicate with me."

Unto and his sons having expressed their willingness shouldered their "Kolhares" and went away to prepare themselves for the adventure.

In the meantime the Rane had not been idle, for she had through Gunga—whom she now entirely trusted—enlisted the services of Junki Pursad and Alli Murad, Durbans or door-keepers of the palace, and having heard from Bukshish Alle—who, as the reader knows, was loyal to her—that Bolanath would take the Gwalior road, for Bukshish Alle saw no reason for doubting what Bolanath told him on this point, she had sent these two ruffians—for they deserved no better name—to lay in wait about a quarter of a mile on the road to Gwalior with orders to seize Bolanath and bring him to her, for which service they were to receive a reward of two hundred rupees each. They did as they were directed, but as the reader is aware, their plans were frustrated by the accident of Bolanath not carrying out his intentions of feigning to take the road they were hid upon.

We must now return to Bolanath whose spirits rose when he found himself actually mounted and his back fairly turned on Ranepore.

He said to himself:—"I have, through Bhagwan's goodness, really escaped from my enemies, both English and Hindostani. It is fortunate that foreseeing that necessity might arise I have remitted money to Cawnpore, which is at my credit with my banker there. I feel I shall weather the storm yet, and if I don't pay off that devil Luchme Bhie if ever I have a chance and the Sahib Log also, may I be defiled and lose my caste as a Brahman." He had just said this to himself when his pony, who was going at a fast amble, gave a sudden trip forward, tried bravely to recover himself,

but getting his legs entangled in the rope held by Unto and one of his sons, fell on his nose and sent Bolanath sprawling on his face and hands on the ground in front of him. Before he could recover himself two strong arms—those of Unto's son Puggo, who had been told off for this work, while Unto and Buggo lay down, one on each side of the road, holding the rope which was to secure the unfortunate Bolanath—were tightly closed on his neck, and the rope being passed round him, his arms were first secured to his body and then his legs were also bound round with the same rope, thus rendering him perfectly helpless. At the same time, to prevent any outcry, a gag was tightly pressed into his mouth and tied behind his head and he was prevented seeing who his captors were by a cloth bandage being passed over his eyes and secured. He then felt himself lifted between two men who moved off with him at a quick pace, without speaking a word.

After Bolanath—who now gave himself over to his fate—had thus proceeded about a mile or two, as far as he could judge, he heard one of his carriers address the others in a language he had no acquaintance with and did not in the least understand. On this a sudden stop took place and he was once more, much to his delight, placed upon his legs and the bandage removed from his eyes. The first thing he did was to look anxiously about him, but nothing but a low flat scrub jungle met his eager view. Through this there ran a narrow winding footpath formed partly by animals and partly by man. Bolanath then turned his attention to his escort and saw standing near three very peculiar-looking men, who from their features, high cheek bones, prominent foreheads, scanty clothing and unmistakable jungly looks, he guessed to be Gondes or hill men. They were, as the reader knows, Unto and his two sons, sent by Gordon to prevent Bolanath's escape. One of them held the pony that he so short a time before had mounted, with so much glee and satisfaction when setting out on his journey, with

every prospect of escaping from his enemies. The eldest of the party—old Unto—addressed their prisoner in Hindostani, and said:—

"I strongly advise you to ask no questions, indeed it would be of little use your doing so, and it would be as well that you understood that any attempt at escape may cost you your life, which—worthless as it has been—I have no doubt but that you value. I will now remove the gag, but if you trouble us with questions it will at once be replaced; submit quietly Bolanath, and it will be the best for you in the end." Bolanath signified his assent by nodding his head, and Unto removed the piece of stick which served as a gag and which had been pressed somewhat inconveniently tightly into Bolanath's mouth and tied with a piece of hemp behind his head.

Unto then said:—"Be so good as to mount, we have a long journey before us." He then, with the assistance of his sons, proceeded to lift the prisoner on to the pony, and having done so, he tied the bridle round his own arm, and thus leading the willing little animal they set off at a smart pace along the path which has been already mentioned.

Bolanath had never seen Unto or his sons before, and was at a loss to discover into whose hands he had fallen, but he suspected the Rane was at the bottom of his misfortunes and that his captors were her servants, and, notwithstanding the warning given him by Unto, he thought he would try what a little bribery would do for him. So he ventured to say:—"My jungle friends, pray excuse my saying a few words. I have not the advantage of knowing who you are, but am inclined to think that from your appearance your worldly prospects are not such as would lead you to be unwilling to receive a bag of rupees, and that such would be acceptable to you I have but little doubt. I happen to be in a position to oblige you, not that I have anything of the sort with me here, but should you think my offer worthy consideration and that it would suit you to let me go, I would

give you an order for 500 rupees, or even more if that will not tempt you, on a respectable mahajan in Cawnpore."

To this speech Bolanath received no reply, but Unto significantly shook the gag (which he still held in one of his hands) at Bolanath, implying that any further such offer would be followed by replacing it as formerly in his mouth, and the party proceeded as before in silence.

About noon they halted at a well on the road-side and having dismounted Bolanath, they proceeded to cook some chapatees, of which they made a frugal meal. Bolanath being a Brahman, was allowed to cook for himself. Before starting Unto appeared to think it as well to give his prisoner some advice and addressing him said :—" A little time ago you attempted to bribe us ; do not do this again, for no bribe will tempt us to either tell you who we are, or to let you go. Just submit to your ' Nasib,' you will find it by far the best plan."

They then started again, and Bolanath, seeing that his guard was uncorruptible and that he had only made his position more unbearable than before, resolved to wait patiently the course of events, and this he was the better able to do as there was a look of honesty and good faith in the rough weather-beaten countenances of his escort, which led him, being a bit of a physiognomist, to think that after all he might have fallen into worse hands. Rendered wise by experience, therefore, he did not again attempt to speak or ask any more questions.

As the little party proceeded, the character of the surrounding country became wilder and more hilly, and the jungle thicker, and sometimes interspersed with grand old Mowha trees. Towards evening they arrived at the foot of a high rocky ridge of hills covered with thick brushwood.

Here a halt was called, and Unto, addressing Bolanath, said :—" You must now dismount, bid good-bye to your pony, and accompany us on foot up the hill side "—but in a whisper he said to Puggo—

"Return and tell the Sahib what has happened, mount the pony and you will soon be back at Ranepore; inform Gordon Sahib that the prisoner will be kept safe in the 'Jogees' cave until he tells us what he wishes done with him. You must return as quickly as you can and let me know what he orders."

Then, again turning to Bolanath, he said, somewhat imperatively—"Follow me, I will walk before you, and Buggo behind, you know better than to attempt escape," and Unto pointed to his trusty Kolhare significantly.

CHAPTER XIX.

IT was some little time before Unto could find a small and hardly perceptible opening into the bushes, and a track or path (which led under a gigantic thorn bush) only just large enough to admit one person at a time, and so overshadowed by the bush as to make it necessary that anyone entering this opening should do so on all fours, and so crawl under the brushwood and 'bide a wee' thorns which obstructed the path—in fact the track was more like that made by wild beasts than a foot-path made by man.

Unto entered first, then Bolanath, followed by Buggo. They crawled on for about forty yards and then found themselves some little way up the side of the hill, up which the path ran in a zig-zag manner, first to right and then to left, and was sometimes so perpendicular as to make climbing necessary. When they had arrived about half way up Unto, turning round to Bolanath, said:—"Ah Brahman, you seldom have had such healthy exercise for your limbs as this, here you will find shelter and food; the cavern you see before you is the Jogee's cave."

Then pushing the branch of a tree aside, he exposed to Bolanath's view an entrance into a large opening in the hill forming a cave, and—to Bolanath's no small terror—on a chabutra or raised dais of stone sat a chained panther, just apparently awakened from a sound sleep by the approach of the party entering the cave.

Bolanath's first impulse was to retire precipitately but a hand was placed on his shoulder by Unto who said:—"Do

not fear, no harm will come to you. Do you not see that Kullo is chained ?"

Bolanath, in some degree reassured by what Unto said, looked again more attentively and saw that the panther was, as stated, prevented leaving the vicinity of the chabutra by a heavy iron chain attached to a collar and fastened to a stone projecting from and forming part of the wall of the cave. He also saw a large fierce looking dog, lying close to the panther, who recognised the presence of his master, Unto, by stretching himself and wagging his long bushy tail.

This dog—Unto told him—was a bosom friend of Kullo the panther, and that his name was Bajo—he was of a famous Bunjara breed, very difficult to obtain as the Bunjaras objected to any of their dogs being given to persons not of their own clan. Unto had got him with difficulty as a pup in return for a service rendered to a Bunjara chief, and had brought Bajo up with Kullo, indeed they were foster brothers, having been suckled by a goat belonging to Unto's wife. Kullo had been picked up the size of a kitten in the jungle, by one of Unto's sons (who had shot his mother) and brought home as a companion to Bajo. They had never been separated, and had formed a strong attachment for each other. They now constituted the guardians of Unto's jungle residence—commonly called the Jogee's cave—and effectually prevented the visits of any of the people forming the scanty population of these parts whose curiosity might otherwise have led them to invade the privacy of Unto's cave, which was not only avoided on this account, but also from a superstitious belief in its being what the Scotch would call " na canny," and being haunted by " Bhuts," or evil or earth-bound denizens of the unseen world.

Much to Bolanath's distress Unto let both Kullo and Bajo loose to enjoy a romp together, which they did with evident signs of satisfaction. At last even Bolanath began to think the occupants of the cave were not so much to be feared as he at first imagined.

After a time Unto took hold of Kullo's chain and fastened it to a stone close to the entrance of the cave so that no one could either go out or enter without coming within his reach; then turning to Bolanath, he said:—"Behold your sentinel, as long as you remain quietly inside you are safe, but Kullo quite understands his business, and if you attempt to pass him he will tear you to pieces, and I have no doubt but that his friend Bajo will willingly help him. You see there is a small spring of water within the cave, you have also cooking materials and there is flour, salt and ghee in that corner"—pointing to a remote part of the cave—"also wood and Bratties to form a fire with—what more can a holy man, a Brahman like you require? Spend your time in contemplation and prayer and consider yourself my prisoner until I release you. You will see one of us here once or twice a day in case you require anything, and to feed the animals, but do not attempt escape if you are wise. Before leaving I must not forget to introduce you to another companion, who will also remain in the cave to keep you company."

Saying this, Unto lifted the lid from a clay pot or "ghurra," that lay in a corner of the cave close to a ghastly image of the 'Burre Dew' the god worshipped by all Gondes,—and on his doing so, a magnificent black Cobra raised his crested head, and contemplated the company, turning it first to one side then to the other as is the invariable custom of Cobras. As Bolanath caught the eye of the king of snakes—for such the Cobra may fairly be considered—he shuddered, and began to think his tortures were never to end. Unto, however, reassured him again, saying:—

"Do not fear the nag, it would as you know, never hurt a holy Brahman. I will show you how tame the guardian of the 'Burre Dew' is."

He then reached down from a shelf cut in the walls of the cave a small bamboo basket containing several fowls eggs, and placed it before the Cobra. The snake appeared to appreciate the intended kindness and acknowledged the

attention to its wants by repeatedly passing in and out in a jerky manner its long forked tongue, and expanding its spectacle painted crest still more than before After having taken a deliberate look at the contents of the basket it suddenly darted its head with wide extended jaws showing the deadly, crooked, poisonous fang, into it and deliberately swallowed one of the eggs, which might be seen passing whole down its throat until it reached about half-way down its body where it remained a fixture until it should become dissolved by the slow process of digestion.

This operation was again repeated, when the snake's appetite for eggs appeared to be satisfied.

Unto then stepped forward and removing the basket replaced it with a saucer of milk, which his wife, Lanche, had just brought, and the snake having again expressed approval as above described, proceeded to lap up the milk with its tongue, and apparently satisfied, lay down again in its clay resting place, which was covered over by Unto and replaced close in front of the image of the god.

Then turning to Bolanath he said :—" I am about to leave you, but as I told you before, either my son, or wife, or myself will visit you daily and ascertain your wants, and what is more important, feed Kullo, Bajo, and the Nag, they will be your companions, and though I say it—a Gonde—you might have worse associates. The best advice I can give you is, don't think of escape, or if you do think of it—for man cannot control his thoughts always—at any rate don't attempt it, for if you try to pass Kullo he will certainly make a meal of you. As yet he has not—to my knowledge—tasted Brahman's flesh, but I never heard that one of his kind had any real objection to such food on the score of caste, so be a wise man, Bolanath, and accept your fate whatever it may be."

The party then left the cave and Bolanath, seeing there was no alternative, betook himself to the Chabutra, and native-like, lay down and deliberately composed himself to sleep, being entirely overcome by the unusual exertion and

excitement of the last twenty-four hours, and we leave him thus, to enjoy for the time the oblivion of his cares and troubles.

Unto, his wife and son, also retired down the hill, and at the bottom of it emerged into the plain below and sought rest in their village of Gonde Gowla, a small hamlet inhabited only by Gondes, situated at the foot of the hill on the edge of the jungle, where they lived, there to await the return of Puggo who had—as the reader will remember—gone to Ranepore to obtain Gordon's orders regarding Bolanath's destination.

CHAPTER XX.

ON the morning of the day Bolanath had taken up—most unwillingly—his abode in Unto's cave, Major Gordon was—as was usually his habit—about eight a.m. sitting dressed in a light morning suit in the verandah of his bungalow, listening to his Sheristadar (the native head of his office) who at that time and place was accustomed to attend daily and read over to him the different reports from the police stations and posts in the district under Gordon's charge.

Hukēm Jee—for such was the familiar designation by which this official was called, whether from his habit of practising as an amateur physician, or from having been originally brought up to and having studied medicine was not clearly known—was a little stout punchy Mahomedan, strongly knit together. He had a Jewish expression of countenance, clear, sparkling, intelligent black eyes and a large prominent hooked nose. He usually wore a large pair of green goggles, and was altogether of so remarkable an appearance that when once seen he was seldom forgotten.

He never went out of his house without his morning dose of opium, but which on no occasion exceeded a certain fixed quantity, and indeed until he had taken this stimulant, he was perfectly incapable of performing his duties, though when primed for the day by it there was not a more capable or intelligent official to be found in all Bundlekund. When travelling from and to office he was always mounted on a frisky, vicious-looking, crop-eared, piebald pony, and girded with a broad sombre skin belt in which hung a formidable curved native sword.

Hukēm Jee was, at the moment we are speaking of, sitting cross-legged (as is customary with those in his position when occupied as he was) on a piece of carpet which Gordon's servant had spread for him near his master, and he was reading out in the usual sing-song monotonous tone—common to his class—the different reports before alluded to for Gordon's information, who on the termination of each paper dictated a suitable reply or order which was indorsed on it.

We will give the reader a specimen of some of these reports and the orders passed upon them :—

Sheristadar's Report.—"The Thanidar of Rāt reports that, having been informed that Kasenath (Budmash) intends starting on a house-breaking expedition, he (the Thanidar) had sent for him, and warned him not to do so; and, so that Kasenath should be thoroughly prevented carrying out his evil intentions, he had directed that one of the police should call at Kasenath's house, situated in Budmash poor, every hour of the night, and knock up Kasenath, and so see that he was present and at home."

Gordon's Orders.—"The Thanidar is informed that the magistrate cannot approve of so cruel a measure as knocking up and awakening anyone every hour of the night, and so interfering with his rest, particularly as there is nothing proved against Kasenath. It is ordered that the Thanidar is not to do this again."

Sheristadar's Report.—"The Thanidar of Gakpile reports that a woman of the name of Luche came to the station, and said that she was '*enciente*,' but could not disclose the name of the father of the expected child, as, if she did, she would most probably be murdered. She was informed that she must take care of herself, for if anything happened, she might get into trouble. She said that under these circumstances she would certainly do so.

Gordon's Orders.—"Thanidar was quite right in telling Luche to take care of herself."

Sheristadar's Report.—"The out-post Jemidar, of

Rutnapore, reports that, while a widow woman of the name of Becka Bhie was employed in weeding her field, she put down her child, of a year old, in the shade of a bush to sleep; but, on hearing a noise behind her, she turned round and saw a wolf running away with the child in its mouth. She pursued it, crying out, but the wolf was too fast for her, and disappeared into the jungle with the child. She was warned not to do it again."

Gordon's Orders.—"It would have been more sensible on the part of the Jemidar if he had told Becka Bhie to leave her children, if she had any more, at home. The reward for the wolf, if killed, will be double that usually paid."

Sheristadar's Report.—The Thanidar of Sowle Nugger reports that the Chapatees brought by the Kotwal of Mouza Dhar were received by the Mulgozar of Sowle Nugger and distributed to the village dogs; and that seven other Chapatees were, as ordered, prepared and sent off to seven different villages, with like orders."

Here Gordon interrupted the reader, and said:—"Hukēm Jee, I hope you have not taken an over-dose of opium this morning. You are reading nonsense."

The Sheristadar looked attentively at the paper he held in his hand, and after a pause said:—"Sahib, I always take a little opium as I think you know, as without it I cannot get on with my work, but I never exceed and I am quite as much puzzled with this report as you are. What can the Thanidar mean about Chapatees being given to dogs?"

"I really cannot imagine," replied Gordon, "but put it aside, some one must be playing us a practical joke, read the next report."

Hukēm Jee, on looking at the next paper, which was also from a police post, saw that it began in much the same way as the one he had just read. He began to read it. It was to the effect that Chapatees had arrived at certain villages, had been distributed among the village dogs and others made and passed on.

He stopped reading and said :—" Sahib, I really think this has some hidden meaning, and is an invention of the dissatisfied so as to cause a feeling of uneasiness in the minds of the people. One Thanidar might have been drunk and have written nonsense, but all the police officers could not be so, and at one time too, and if they were they would not write to the same effect ; and now I look at the remainder of the reports I see they are all much to the same purpose. It is puzzling to know what this refers to, but I am of opinion it bodes no good to the Sirkar. What orders shall I pass on these reports ? "

Gordon replied :—" Write in each that a special report is called for, as to what the people understand this distribution of Chapatees to signify, and Hukēm Jee, I know I can trust you (this was true; Hukēm Jee was to be trusted). You must go and try and ascertain yourself personally what this is intended for, and how it has originated. That will do for to-day, you can go."

Hukēm Jee prepared to depart by buckling on his formidable sword, and having collected his various papers, his kullimdar (or pen box), and tied all up carefully in a piece of square cloth (commonly called a busta) he mounted his skittish pony and with a low salaam rode away in the direction of his house in the city of Ranepore.

As Gordon sat deep in thought, wondering what new danger threatened them now in connection with the circulation of the Chapatees regarding which he had just heard, he saw stealthily approaching him one of Unto's sons, who as the reader may remember, had been sent by his father to report progress.

" Well Puggo," said Gordon, when the Gonde had approached near enough, " I see you have something to tell me, what is it ? "

Puggo related all that had occured the day before, winding up by saying that Bolanath was safe in the Jogee's cave, and asking what Gordon wished done regarding him.

Gordon replied :—" Tell your father from me Puggo, that I am very much pleased with the way in which he has managed and that I wish Bolanath kept in confinement until I can decide what to do with him."

While they were speaking, Bukshish Alle the jail Darogha came up to make his morning report. He salaamed respectfully to Gordon (of whom he had a salutary dread) and said :—" Sahib, your slave is sorry to have to report carelessness on the part of the jail guard as Bolanath has escaped from prison. He dug a hole under the walls of the jail and disappeared through it some time last night. I strongly suspect the Naib Darogha, Hera Lal. I know that you, Sahib, have a high opinion of him, but I can bring several witnessess from the jail guard to prove that he was often seen with Bolanath, and that they were great friends, and Hera Lal must have supplied the prisoner with some instrument which enabled him to dig out this underground passage, and must also have assisted him in secreting the earth dug out of it, which otherwise could not have escaped my notice. A Curpee, or iron spud was found at the opening of the passage with which the hole must have been dug, and I am informed that it can be proved that this belonged to Hera Lal, and indeed the iron smith who made it for him will depose to this. Shall I offer a reward of 500 or 1,000 rupees for the recapture of Bolanath, and Sahib, I strongly advise Hera Lal being at once put into confinement."

Gordon listened with no small degree of amusement (mixed to some extent with anger) to the Darogha's statement, and his cunningly devised charge against Hera Lal (who Gordon knew to be among the very few faithful men under him), but he thought it expedient not to let Bukshish Alle see that he suspected him in any way, so he replied :—

" I am sorry to hear what you report, Bukshish Alle, but you know I never do anything in a hurry ; I will send you written orders presently," and rising, he retired into his bungalow.

Bukshish Alle also went away; he was not quite satisfied with the aspect of affairs and did not like Gordon's manner of treating him; but he saw nothing for it but to return to the jail, and wait the turn of events. He himself was uncertain what had become of Bolanath, but he was under the impression that the Rane had secured him.

The reader may remember that Janki Pursad and Alli Murad had been sent by the Rane to arrest Bolanath, and that on the night of his escape, they had lain in wait for him on the Gwalior Road. This they did until day began to break, and they then thought their best plan would be to go and report their failure to their mistress, so, after performing their morning ablutions, and smoking several strong stimulating chillums, which brought them well on to about nine o'clock, they proceeded to the Rane's palace, and there found Luchme Bhie and Gunga anxiously expecting them. The Rane was the first to speak, and said :—"I see by your aspect and your being empty handed, that you have failed in the service you agreed to perform; say, what has occurred, and why have you not brought that haram khore Bolanath to me, to meet his just and deserved punishment. Have you been lazy, and instead of going, as ordered, to waylay the Brahman, have you been spending the night in the Muddud Khana?"

The door-keepers, on hearing this unjust accusation, crossed their arms on their breasts, and somewhat in the position of a sleeping paddy bird or crane, raised one leg from the ground and stood upon the other—a position, among orientals, betokening the greatest humility and respect. Janki Pursad then (on behalf of both) began saying:—"Protectress of the poor, your servants are in no way to blame; they have, as desired, watched carefully for the coming of that 'Namak-haram' Bolanath on the road leading to Gwalior, but not a sound broke the silence of the night, not even a jackal passed by where we were stationed. Something must have occurred to prevent his escape from jail; but we, at least, are blameless."

On hearing this, Luchme Bhie turned to Gunga, and said:—"Gunga, go at once to Bukshish Alle, and ascertain what has taken place; either what Janki Pursad says is true, and Bolanath has not escaped jail, or if he has done so, he has managed to avoid our men after all our precautions, and I shall be balked of my revenge."

Before, however, Gunga could carry out her mistress's wishes, Bukshish Alle himself (having, as the reader is aware, made his morning report to Gordon) appeared approaching the palace, and he was at once admitted to an audience with the Rane.

With his usual low salutation the jailor said:—"I imagine I have to congratulate you on having got that Budzāt Brahman Bolanath under lock and key; he has, I trust, been seized by your men?"

The Rane looked attentively at the jailor, endeavouring to read the truth in his looks; but she could see nothing in his stolid appearance that led her to think he was deceiving her, so she said:—"No, Darogha Sahib, I have not! My men, who have been watching all night where you said they should, have just reported that no one passed their post, and are under the impression that you have found some difficulty in arranging his escape; but, from what you now say, it would appear otherwise; speak, man! and say what has happened to frustrate our plans?"

It was evident from Bukshish Alle's looks of astonishment that he had acted his part faithfully, and he replied:—

"I am quite as much in the dark as you are yourself. One thing is however certain, and that is that Bolanath did escape from the jail, for the man (a trusted servant of mine) reported to me that he had given him over the pony procured for his use, and saw him start. The cunning Pundit must have suspected something and has taken some other road than the one he gave me to understand he was going by. There is no doubt but that he has really escaped."

Luchme Bhie's eyes glared like that of a tigress deprived

of its prey by some unforseen accident. She stamped with her slippered foot until she made it tremble with pain and the massive gold anklets ring again, but she said not a word, and turning round sought the solitude of her room leaving Gunga and the Darogha to discuss matters.

The two door-keepers having retired on the approach of the jailor, Gunga—who, as the reader knows, was in the secret of what had happened, as Gordon, through his wife Elsie, had taken her into confidence—was the first to speak, and said :—

"I cannot congratulate you, Darogha Sahib, on your sharpness or success in this most important affair, Bolanath has been too cunning for you, and is, I fancy, safe on his road to Cawnpore, where he has powerful friends. May I inquire what you intend doing? What will you say to the Sahib? Do you think he will believe that you had no hand in Bolanath's escape?"

Bukshish Alle thought he saw something in Gunga's eyes and expression that he did not quite like, for do all she could, she could hardly conceal a feeling of merriment at having, in her humble position, been able to thwart and upset the plans of such able plotters as the Rane and the Darogha. Bukshish Alle, in his capacity of jailor, was in the habit of studying physiognomy, and he looked hard at Gunga before he replied :—

"My sister, I have already made my report to the magistrate Sahib, he gave no reply, and from his manner I fear he suspects me of having connived at Bolanath's escape, but before long we shall be independent of all Sahibs when the Rajh of the King of Delhi is proclaimed. Until then, of course, we must behave with our usual prudent humility to keep the Kafir dogs in good humour. But Gunga, why should not you and I be real friends? I see you know more than you say, and remember this, when our turn comes you may want a friend."

This was said at a venture, for sharp and cunning as

Bukshish Alle was, he was not certain as to whether Gunga was aware of more than she chose to tell him.

Gunga replied at once :—" Really Darogha Sahib, I think you must be losing your head, or has some ' Bhut ' possessed you ? Do you think it possible I could be false to my mistress and the good cause ? pray dismiss such ideas from your mind. Good-bye, I must follow the Rane and console her if possible for the loss of her revenge. " Farewell," replied the Darogha as he turned to go, but before Gunga was out of hearing he said :—" Think, Gunga, of what I have said to you, and don't be deceived. The British Rajh has not many days left, so be faithful to your religion and to your mistress." Saying this he walked away, and Gunga muttered to herself as she went to join her mistress :—" It is evident the Darogha mistrusts me, he is a dangerous enemy to have and I must find some plan of throwing dust in his eyes. I shall communicate at once with Elsie," and she took the first opportunity she could find of doing so, and a few hours afterwards told her all that had occurred between herself and the jail Darogha.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHILE affairs at Ranepore were as described in the last chapter, there suddenly came news of so dire and terrifying a nature from Cawnpore that it became evident to all that a crisis could no longer be avoided and that preparations for a final death struggle between white and black must quickly commence.

These tidings were, that General Wheeler (who had been holding out so gallantly behind his imperfect entrenchment) had at the instigation and with promise of safety from the Nana of Bitoor, at last trusted himself, his garrison, and the helpless ladies and children under his protection, to him and his rebel band of Sepahees, and had been cruelly butchered in cold blood, their bodies having been thrown into the never to be forgotton blood-stained well at Cawnpore.

On this being known the conduct and tone of the native troops at Ranepore showed a decided change for the worse, and it was then decided that all the Europeans there should seek the protection of the fort.

With the concurrence of the military, a notice was secretly circulated to the effect that on a certain day fixed, all as usual should go out for their accustomed drive or ride in the afternoon, but at a given hour, instead of returning home they should proceed direct to the fort and remain there, sending for what they required to their houses. Each family was to take one or at most two native servants and no more, the gates were then to be closed and no other native of any description

admitted. This plan was successfully carried out, and all the European community (except the officers attached to regiments, who, to their credit, preferred the risk of death rather than to relinquish the little hold they still had over their men) arrived in safety in the fort, and were allotted rooms according to the available space in it. McLeod, at the wish and request of the military authorities, appointed Gordon governor of the fort, and all arrangements connected with its protection, and accommodation of occupants were undertaken by him, and for a time a feeling of safety and confidence was restored.

When the native troops saw that it was an accomplished fact that the Europeans held the almost impregnable fort in their possession, a great feeling of disappointment began to be felt, but they thought it wisest to conceal this to the best of their ability, at least for a time. They even went so far as to request that the protection of the fort might be entrusted to them, and expressed indignation that their fidelity was being doubted. This, however, did not last long, and was followed by an evident spirit of insubordination and disrespect on the part of the men to their officers.

It was at this time the Rane wrote to Colonel McLeod a letter protesting that she was loyal and asking his permission in consideration of the disturbed state of the country, to enlist a large body of armed men for her protection and that of her property.

This McLeod, knowing that he had but little voice in the matter, but wishing to retain as long as he was able, at least the semblance of friendly relations with Luchme Bhie, consented to.

At the "Ead ol Ftōor," when the Mahomedans met at the Eadgha, prayers were publicly offered up for the rebel army at Delhi, and the people of Ranepore, becoming aware of this, it was generally understood by them that the day for the mutiny of the military force was not far distant.

It was also at this time that Ross and Erskine, two of Gordon's assistants, came to him and stated that they had

ascertained from private and reliable sources that an attack was contemplated on the Star Fort, referred to in the opening chapter of this narrative.

This stone-built entrenchment was situated some little way from the Fort of Ranepore, and these gentlemen suggested that the munitions of war contained in it should be removed to the fort, and recommended that armed men from friendly states should be entertained and placed in charge of the Fort, and if this could not be done they suggested that it would be preferable to retire to the protection of the Fort of Orcha, not many miles distant, in a native State professing friendship to the British, to remaining at the mercy of the mutineers and the Rane of Ranepore.

They asserted that, from the reports they constantly heard, they were convinced the troops would eventually mutiny, and that the lives of all would then be sacrificed.

Gordon heard patiently all they had to say. He, however, placed but little reliance on native chiefs, however friendly their protestations might be, for he knew that it was the general belief that the last days of British supremacy had come, and though (as in duty bound) he put the matter before Colonel McLeod, his official superior, he recommended that reliance should alone be placed in themselves and in no others.

He had but little faith in the statements of Major Colville and Colonel Partridge, who still continued to assert that the troops had no intention of mutinying or committing violence, and Colonel McLeod was of Gordon's opinion. One morning Gordon and McLeod were standing together on the ramparts looking towards the now deserted houses of the station, when they saw twelve or fourteen native troopers riding towards them. These halted under the walls of the fort and a native officer, who appeared to be their leader, addressed Colonel McLeod, and said:—"We have been sent by Colonel Partridge to say that though some of the troops have mutinied, all have not, and he recommends that

you should return to your houses and so confidence will be restored."

It is hardly necessary to say that so insane a proposal was at once scouted by the gentlemen to whom it was addressed, who even did not believe that it had been made by Colonel Partridge, but considered it to be simply an attempt on the part of the rebels to get them into their hands. A carefully worded written reply was, however, sent to the effect that it was not considered advisable to comply with the suggestion for the present at all events, but that, if things went smoothly, in a few days it might be adopted, and with this the troopers returned to their officers.

When they had gone Gordon remarked to McLeod:—"The infatuation of our officers as to the good faith and staunchness of their men is to me wonderful and beyond belief. One cannot help admiring their courage and contempt of danger, but, knowing what we do, it is impossible not to feel regret that so true and brave a confidence should be so misplaced, for once blood is drawn no quarter will be given."

"True, Gordon," replied McLeod, "but we must hope for the best, and if it was not for the fearful burthen of care and anxiety we all feel on account of the ladies and children, I am almost tempted to say I wish matters would come to a head, and that we might be brought face to face with our enemies. Anything is preferable to this continued and unbearable state of uncertainty and constant alarm. It is, however, very desirable, Gordon, that we should open communication with the Rane personally, with regard to the letter she sent me professing loyalty and goodwill, for we must not throw away a chance however remote, though we know through faithful Gunga what is really going on behind the scenes. If you could manage so that Ross or Erskine, or both of them should visit the Rane secretly and at night perhaps they might influence her in some degree. At any rate they may be able to ascertain something regarding her present intentions, for it is clearly evident she is now looked upon as the ruler of Ranepore.

"Propose it to them, that after dark they shall be let down over the wall and pay her a visit and take a message from me to her to the effect that if she will save the women and children, and give them a safe escort to Sangor—which I am convinced she can do—our everlasting gratitude will be due to her, and the Government will, when matters right themselves, amply reward her."

Gordon replied :—"I will do as you desire, but I do not believe she would put out even her little finger to save any of us, her enmity to and detestation of us is too deeply rooted for that. She is entirely (in my opinion) unworthy of trust."

They then parted, and Gordon sent for Mr. Ross and Mr. Erskine, and told them what McLeod had proposed, saying :—

"I, myself, have but little hope in your being able to effect any good, but I see no harm in trying, except that the personal danger you will be exposed to, which it would be unfair to hide from you, will be very great."

They replied that they were ready and willing to incur the risk, and the same evening was fixed on as that on which their visit to the palace was to be undertaken.

About nine o'clock at night Gordon and his two assistants met on one of the bastions of the outer wall of the Fort, according to pre-arrangement Gordon had supplied himself with a knotted rope for them to descend by, and Ross and Erskine, disguised as natives, expressed their readiness to start. Gordon, then wishing them good-bye, fastened the rope to a projecting piece of stone, and first Erskine, and then Ross descended by it, hand over hand, until they reached the ground, which they soon did, as the descent did not exceed fifty or sixty feet.

Gordon then withdrew the rope, which he said he would replace for them to return by, and would himself remain there to assist.

He watched the departure of his two friends from the foot of the wall in the direction of the palace, with sad forebodings as to what would be their fate, and then laid himself

down at full length on the old moss-covered wall, for he was tired and worn out both in mind and body. After a short period he fell asleep, and in dreams visited his native glen, and the much loved scenes of his childhood. These passed away again, and he imagined himself to be in Orisa among the wild hill men of that province, and the scene of the rescue of Elsie from death, and his subsequent marriage with her, appeared to be renewed. Again the scene changed, and he thought he was lying where he had fallen asleep, but over him in the dim light he saw bending a shadowy form regarding him with a fixed but melancholy look of attention. The features were familiar to him though very many eventful years had passed since he had last seen them. He could not mistake them, for they were those of his mother, and the look of love in her well-remembered face and eyes quickly and vividly recalled to mind the long-passed joyful days of his childhood, when the affection and maternal care of her he loved dearest on earth were freely and ungrudgingly bestowed on him.

"Shalto, my son," the phantom (for such Gordon took it to be) said:—"I am permitted to come to warn you of danger, and to advise you in your difficulties. Though most of your companions here are doomed to pass from earth life very soon, you will not do so for many years to come; for you will revisit your native land and regain possession of your ancestral estates. You must not lose heart, you have dear, loving friends, both on earth and in the next sphere of being, who will assist and guard you to their utmost. For the good of others as well as yourself it is your duty to escape; the opportunity will be offered and you must not let any false notions of honour prevent you taking advantage of it."

The form here ceased speaking, and Gordon heard or thought he heard a distant sound like a scream of some one in dire distress. This fully recalled him to his senses, and he sat up and looked about him, wondering whether what he had seen and heard was indeed a dream, a vision, or a reality.

While so thinking he again heard repeated a shriek, similar to the one which had aroused him from his sleep; but this time there could be no mistaking it, or that it came from the Rane's palace, and was a cry of pain as of some one in his last agony.

"Poor young fellows," muttured Gordon to himself, "I well know what that means. I felt when despatching them on so dangerous an errand that I was sending them to their death, and such, I now much fear, has been the case; but I acted for the best, and under orders too. I must at any rate now remain here, on the chance of their return," and this he did until the day broke, and then with sad feelings of regret and sorrow he retired to the interior or habitable part of the fort to relate to McLeod all that had happened. The latter, on hearing Gordon's narrative, deeply sympathised with him, and now—too late—much regretted having sent the two young men on so dangerous a mission.

CHAPTER XXII.

BEFORE entering the fort, Elsie had told Gordon that she had made up her mind that she would remain in the town, for two good reasons. One was because she felt that, in her doubtful position, she would rather not be brought into close contact with European ladies, and the other was that, being a native, she was to a certain degree comparatively safe, and could more easily render assistance to those beleagured in it, and procure information with greater facility than if she was confined with them.

To this Gordon agreed, though reluctantly, and Elsie took up her abode in the house of Akia Mul, the old and trustworthy treasurer, a man of good repute, and who, being wealthy, had every inducement to side with the cause of order, as he would be one of the first to be plundered, should rebellion and looting once commence. By this arrangement Elsie also had greater facility of communication with Gunga who, as the reader knows, was constantly on the look out for information, and who closely watched the Rane.

We must now follow Ross and Erskine in their dangerous mission to the Rane, On landing on their feet at the bottom of the wall, they looked anxiously around, but saw nothing in any way to alarm them. All was still and silent, so they stole quietly away in the direction of the palace. To get to it, however, there were several dark narrow streets to pass and they proceeded through them cautiously, but unmolested, until they arrived close to the outer wall of the palace. Here they paused, thinking how they might obtain access to

the Rane. As they did so they observed a band of seven or eight armed men coming towards them, headed by Alli Murod and Junki Pursad—durbans of the Rane—who had, indeed, though unknown to Ross and Erskine, been watching them ever since their descent from the walls of the fort.

The two unfortunate young men were at once seized, and though remonstrating, were pinioned, their hands being tied behind their backs. When this had been done, Alli Murod, as spokesman, said:—

"You thieves and robbers, what are you wandering about the streets of Ranepore for at this late hour? Who are you?" Ross replied:—"We are, as you will perceive on looking attentively at us, English gentlemen, and should be well known to you as Major Gordon's assistants; we have been sent with a message from the Commissioner Colonel McLeod to the Rane Sahiba, and we beg we may now be taken to her, and that the ropes with which you have bound us—I imagine under a mistake—may at once be removed."

Alli Murad, spitting on the ground to show his contempt, said:—"Faringee dogs, you have of your own accord come to meet your well-deserved fate. Do you not know that we acknowledge none but the king of Delhi; and that he has ordered that unbelievers, such as you are, shall be slain and sent to everlasting perdition, unless they embrace the true faith and become Mahomedans and followers of the prophet. Are you prepared to do this? If not, you must die."

Ross replied:—"This you know to be impossible. The king of Delhi may be your ruler, but I imagine you acknowledge the authority of the Rane also, at least in Ranepore, and we claim to be taken to her."

Junki Pursad here interfered, and said:—"Alli Murad, you must remember we are not all Musalmāns; and we Hindoos, though we are prepared to be subjects of the Delhi Rajh, are equal sharers in power with you Mahomedans; so do not arrogate all authority to yourselves."

Then, addressing Ross and Erskine, he said:—"You

must know that we are here by the orders of the Bhie Sahiba herself, and she has decided that you are to die. We saw you descending from the walls of the Fort, and have been watching you from there. The Rane has been informed of your coming, and has ordered you to be put to death. If you do not believe this, look up at that open window, there is the Rane Sahiba herself looking on. Say what you like to her, we are but her servants, and must carry out her orders."

Doing as was suggested, Ross and Erskine looked up and saw Luchme Bhie sitting watching them from a window of her palace. They attempted to communicate with her and asked her protection, but with no effect, for she herself, by passing her hand across her throat, gave a sign for the work of murder to commence, on which the unfortunate young Englishmen, who were in a perfectly indefensible state being bound hand and foot, were cut and stabbed to death in a most cruel and cowardly manner; and it was their shrieks of agony (which they could not under these circumstances repress) that awoke Gordon, as the reader knows, from his restless disturbed slumbers on the walls of the old bastion of the Fort, where he vainly awaited their return.

On the afternoon of the following day two clerks of Major Gordon's office, who, being half-castes, had ventured to remain outside, and had not availed themselves of the protection of the Fort, were seen from the walls running towards it. They showed great symptoms of terror, and exclaimed that the mutiny of the troops had commenced, that Major Colville, his Adjutant Burgess, Colonel Partridge, his second in command, Captain Dunlop, and several others were threatened, but were together. It was then observed from the walls that a great number of people from the City of Ranepore were proceeding towards the lines of the troops (where the mutineers were assembled) carrying two flags, and among them could be seen and recognised—through a telescope—the followers and adherents of the Rane.

On the arrival of these people at the lines of the Infantry and Irregular Cavalry Regiments, a person of the name of Ahsum Alli called all the Mahomedans to prayer at the chief Muzjid, and there the greater part of the Sepahees of both branches of the service declared themselves mutineers.

Only one native officer, Jemidar Rustum, a Hanildar by name Bhawane Pursad, and about thirty-five men stood by their officers and formed a small group, between the Star Fort and the town and fort of Ranepore. The rabble from the city then proceeded to release the jail prisoners, who willingly joined them, with the jail guard, headed by Bukshish Alle, the Darogha. Unopposed they set fire to the Government offices and houses in the now deserted Cantonment.

A large body of the mutineers advanced on the small band of English officers and faithful men, now almost entirely at their mercy. The rebels (seeing the determined front shown by these few brave men who disdained to retire before or even to parley with them, and were prepared to die rather than show symptoms of fear or hesitation) opened a fire of musketry and matchlocks. The heroic little group returned the fire as best they could, at the command of their officers; but the unequal combat could not long be maintained, and both officers and men were quickly shot down where they stood, and afterwards such as were only wounded, were bayonetted as they lay by their unsparing and infuriated foe. Among the officers only one, Peter Burgess, escaped on horseback, sorely wounded, to the Fort and was admitted into it. The rebels then emboldened by their success advanced against the Fort itself, but there the fire of the gentlemen manning its walls—most of them sportsmen and good shots—soon caused them to hesitate, and then to retire a good deal faster than they had advanced.

Night coming on the rebels left the vicinity of the Fort, placing, however, a guard of men belonging to the levies raised by the Rane round the walls, though under cover, so as to prevent the possibility of escape from it. During the night

a meeting was held on the parade ground between the agents of the Rane and the mutinous troops with regard to what should now be done, and as to who was to have the government of Bundlekund, and as to how the Europeans in the fort were to be disposed of. Some were for letting them escape and even escorting them as far as Sangor in safety, but this proposition was over-ruled by Bukshish Alle, Laltabade (Hanildar-Major), and Fez Alli (Ressaldar) of the Irregular Cavalry Regiment, and their death was decided on as the only safe plan. It was thought advisable, if possible, to try and induce the occupants of the fort to vacate it peaceably and under a promise of protection; and Fez Alli wrote a letter to Burgess to the effect that he himself was, though obliged to join the mutineers, a well-wisher to the English, and that in that capacity he strongly recommended and advised them to come out, and that if they did so they would in no way be injured but would be escorted in safety to Sangor. This was shown to McLeod and Gordon who thought it not even worth an answer, and none was sent.

At about 2 p.m. of the following day an attack was again made on the Fort, and firing commenced on both sides with vigour and lasted until evening, the rebels, however, keeping so well under cover, that few of them were killed or wounded by the fire from the besieged. The zeal of the attacking party was becoming somewhat damped as they saw that musket and matchlock bullets had but little effect on the stone walls, which so effectually shielded their enemies, and the mutinous Sepahees began to talk of marching off for Delhi to join their comrades of the Bengal army, already assembled there. The Rane seeing that if this was permitted, it was quite possible a reaction might take place in favour of the English (should the Sepahees leave), distributed a large sum of money among them and furnished them with some old cannon, dug up from a place where it had been long concealed.

At daylight, on the 8th of June, a vigorous attack was made again on all sides, and scaling ladders, which had in

the meantime been constructed, were brought up and placed against the walls and an attempt at escalade made. In this the loss of the rebels was considerable, but they succeeded in getting possession of the outer and lower works of the Fort.

It was at this time that Captain Powis, an assistant surveyor attached to Ranepore who with his wife and children had sought protection in the Fort, was killed inside it, by his own orderly Jemidar, who having been considered trustworthy by him, had been brought into it, but who now made an attempt to open one of the gates to the mutineers, and it was because Powis prevented this that the Jemidar stabbed him. He was, however, shot by Gordon, who happened to be near and observed what had occurred. By this the reader will perceive that the small garrison had not only a determined and fanatical foe to contend with outside, but had also treachery within to guard against.

Gordon had taken his post at an open window over-looking the lowest part of the wall, which was, indeed, the only place where it was possible the enemy might, by the use of their ladders, effect an entrance. Long practice as a "Shikare" had made him a deadly shot, and this acquirement stood him in good stead now, for none of the rebels could expose even the smallest part of their bodies without receiving the contents of Gordon's deadly rifle.

It was then that a picked shot, a man of the name of Noor Alli, one of the followers of the Rane, conceived a plan by which he thought he might get an opportunity of firing at Gordon without himself being exposed. He had observed that gentleman always during the day sat at a small square window commanding an extensive view, and from which he seldom absented himself. "Noor Alli" also saw that during the heat of the day Gordon had fixed up a small piece of matting to keep off the intense heat of the sun, and that to shift this so as to keep himself in the shade as the sun's rays varied according to its altitude, he had often to expose

a great portion of his body at the window, and Noor Alli formed his plans accordingly.

Under cover of darkness he managed to creep up near to the wall and hide himself under a large boulder of stone which happened to be there and commanded a view of the window. He then laid his matchlock over the stone—which concealed his person—and while Gordon was absent for a short period at daylight he brought the sights to bear in the middle of the window, where he knew Gordon would shortly appear to secure his piece of matting, and, crouching down himself behind the stone, he awaited his reappearance. He had not long to wait. The first thing Gordon did on his arrival was to commence adjusting the mat so as to keep off the morning sun—for it must be remembered this was one of the hottest parts of the year and the sun was disagreeably warm even immediately on rising. In doing this he necessarily exposed his chest and head, and Noor Alli, seeing this, took deliberate aim at him and pressed the trigger of his match-lock. The bullet flew straight and true and struck Gordon full in the chest, and he fell backwards in the arms of little Budrōo, who had just arrived with his breakfast, and who had sat down ready to do anything that might be required of him.

A shout of triumph arose from the rebels who had been informed by Noor Alli of his plan, and had been watching to see whether it would be successful or not. They well knew that one of their most formidable opponents had been disposed of and removed from their path.

When Gordon fell into Budrōo's arms, the latter shouted for assistance, and this soon arrived in the shape of an old friend, Dr. Bailie, who of late, as the reader may easily imagine, had had no sinecure of it, for he was the only medical man in the fort, and his services were in great demand. He was accompanied by his daughter Kate, who had assumed the duties of assistant to her father, combined with those of nurse to the wounded, when she had any time to spare from

her work with her father. On seeing Gordon, who lay senseless on the floor, the old kind-hearted doctor shook his head, and a tear dropped unobserved from his cheek, for he saw that the bullet had entered the chest, and he knew by the stream of blood which he saw stealing out from under Gordon's back and running down the floor, that it must have penetrated through his body. Gordon had been his personal friend and a great favourite of his. He, however, stooped down and began feeling his pulse, as is always the way with doctors, and on doing so Bailie's looks changed, and he said:—"This is extraordinary; the heart beats freely, the pulse is quite perceptible! Kate, put a little brandy and water in his mouth."

This his daughter hastened to do, taking the stimulant from a small basket she carried with her, containing her father's instruments, plaster, lint, and other useful materials of a like sort. This seemed to revive the wounded officer, who opened his eyes and said, though in a low voice:—"I feel very faint and stunned, I fancy I must have been hit; all I remember is feeling a blow on the chest, just here," putting his hand to where he was wounded, "but I am better now; examine the wound please, doctor, and tell me what I may expect."

On this, old Bob Bailie at once commenced removing Gordon's clothes and, having done so, he observed a raised blue and discolored mark or line under the skin, running round the chest from the hole where the small matchlock bullet had entered, and terminating at the orifice or hole in the back before referred to. The old man's face brightened up, and he said:—"Gordon, you have had a narrow escape, for the bullet, turned apparently by one of your ribs, instead of passing through, which would be its natural course, has taken it into its head, as is sometimes the case, to run round your body just under the skin, and make its exit at your back. As far as I can see there is no cause for any alarm—God be praised, for we could ill afford to lose you! But you have

had a wonderful escape." He then dressed and bound up the wound, with the help and gentle assistance of Kate, who, when he had gone away to visit others requiring his attention, took her seat near Gordon, in an adjoining room, and endeavoured to cheer him up by her conversation and kind and attractive ways. And another of the small garrison took Gordon's place at the window for a time.

Several days had passed since what we have related took place, and Gordon was convalescent, though unable to take any active part in the defence, and was under the watchful care of his self-constituted kind nurse, Kate Bailie, who spent the greater part of her unemployed time in his company. The reader will remember that Elsie of her own accord had chosen to remain outside the Fort, and had taken protection in the house of the Treasurer, Akia Mul.

One evening, some days after Gordon had been wounded—of which Elsie was unaware—she was sitting in a small garden and enclosure which surrounded the house, thinking how she should manage to communicate with her husband when she saw no less a person approaching her than old "Unto," the Gond Shikare. As he came up to her he made a respectful salaam, saying :—

"I have been seeking an interview for some days, and have at last succeeded in finding you. I did not like to enquire for you, as I thought it might get abroad that you were not in the Fort, and you might sustain injury by it. I have had to climb over the wall and shall go back the same way, without being seen. I feel that we are bound to do something to assist our kind friends, the Sahibs, who are confined in the Fort and surrounded by enemies; and Unto is not the man to desert them in their time of need. I have been forming a plan, and I wish to consult you about it. We must first manage to open communication with them, and I—by the help of Bhagwan—think I can do this, and I am the more anxious to do it, as I know my kind good master and your husband has been wounded."

On hearing this poor Elsie turned pale and faint with emotion, but she was not the woman long to give way to such feelings, and recovering herself, she said:—"Unto, rely on me, I am with you hand and heart in anything you propose; I do so wish to be with my husband again, after what you have told me."

Unto replied:—"Be of good cheer, for I also heard that the wound was not a dangerous one, though thought to be so at first. I will now tell you my plans:—

"You must know that, though it may appear curious to you, I am acquainted with a passage leading from outside into the Fort; I will tell you how I became aware of it. When a little boy, and when my father 'Luggo' was living, he was employed by the Ruler of Ranepore in carrying treasure, arms, and ammunition into the Fort. I am not aware what the object was for keeping this proceeding a secret, but I have no doubt there was some good reason for it—I was then young, and I was not informed. It was thought that if men from a distance were employed, and then sent away from the city, there would be less chance of the matter being talked of or discovered, at least this is the impression on my mind. However that may be, I accompanied my father, and several other Gondes, to Ranepore, and we were set to open out an old passage into the Fort—which commenced in the wall of the room where the Rane is said to hold her nightly assemblies, and which communicates with the outside through the 'Chandare Bowlie.' This passage leads up through the ground on which the Fort is built, and opens out into it, the entrance being hid, and filled up by an iron trap door, covered over with dirt and dust, so that it resembles the rest of the floor. But if this door is pressed up from below, it will give way and open; and it is through it that I propose communicating with our friends. But the first step to be taken is to obtain the key of the vaulted room, which is in the Rane's possession; and Gunga is the only person who can do this for us. She must open the door

leading into this room from her side, and admit us through the passage leading into it, from the Bowlie; this she can easily do, if she can get hold of the key, for she can enter the room from the palace. So the first thing to be done, respected lady, is to let Gunga know what is required of her. If we could only get Major Gordon out of the Fort and away from it, without the rebels' knowledge, he would be able to obtain help from the English Government. While the Sahibs and Mēm Sahibs are confined in the way they now are, they cannot communicate with their friends, so as to obtain assistance. You may depend upon it, Elsie Sahiba, that the English will get their heads up yet; for my son 'Puggo,' who sometimes falls into a wonderful state of trance, in one of them declared that he saw the armies of England advancing through rivers of blood into Hindostan, and triumphing over their enemies; and Puggo is never wrong when so entranced! Will you manage to arrange with Gunga, and in three days hence I will come again."

Elsie thought over what 'Unto' proposed, and feeling that what he said was right, or, at any rate, was a relief from the inaction which was to her unbearable, said:—"What you say appears to be perfectly feasible, and I will do my best in the matter;" and then, thanking him for his kind feelings to her husband, let him depart, which he did in the same way as he had come.

On the promised day—three days from that of her first meeting with Unto—Elsie was again sitting, expecting him, in Akia Mul's enclosed garden, and Unto punctually made his appearance.

Elsie, addressing him, said:—"I have seen Gunga, who takes every opportunity she can find of visiting me; and she tells me there will be no difficulty in admitting us into the vaulted room, as she can easily get possession of the key, which hangs on the wall in the Rane's own room. She will take an opportunity of unlocking the door leading from Chandare Bowlie into it and will leave it closed but

unfastened; so all that we shall have to do will be to push it open, when we enter through the Bowlie. The door leading from the vaulted room back to the palace she will again lock on her return and replace the key; so that part of our plan is arranged for."

On hearing this, Unto said:—"Then, to-morrow night I shall expect to meet you at the entrance of Chandare Bowlie, where I shall be with my sons, and implements for clearing the entrance and breaking through the wall which closes the door to the subterranean passage."

Elsie agreed to this, and they again parted, to meet, as arranged, at Chandare Bowlie.

This they did, the party consisting of Elsie, Unto, Puggo, and Buggo. Unto had brought two good strong ponies with him, so as to be in readiness, should they succeed in effecting the escape of any of the garrison of the Fort. These little hardy animals were tied up in one of the recesses of the Bowlie, where, being supplied by Puggo with bundles of green grass, they commenced contentedly consuming it with no inconsiderable degree of relish.

CHAPTER XXIII.

UNTO led the way into the arched entrance of the well, and the party passed through the small square room occupied by the image of Bhawani, salaaming with some degree of reverence to the grim goddess as they passed. They came to the door of the vaulted chamber, in which, as the reader knows, the Rane held her assembly on the day of the conference, before receiving the European community of Ranepore; and pushing it open, were admitted into this room, which was now lighted only by a dim glimmer coming from the passage through which they had just entered.

Here Elsie produced a small lantern and a box of matches, and having lighted the candle fixed in the lantern, she closed the door by which they had come in, saying to Unto :— "My friend, it now remains for you to point out where the entrance to the passage leading into the Fort commences."

Unto replied :—"It is many years since I was here, and I was only a lad then, but I have a distinct recollection of seeing a door somewhere in the wall, which was built up by my father and his companions. It was in the part of it to the north end of the room, just about here;" and Unto began tapping the wall of the chamber with an iron spud which he had brought with him. After a time he came to a part of the structure which, on being struck, sounded hollow, and with a smile of satisfaction he turned round, and said :—"I thought I could not be mistaken; here is the door," and at once commenced picking a hole in the wall with his spud. After half an hour's work—for time had hardened the material with

which the door had been built up—an opening was effected, disclosing the beginning of a narrow dark spiral staircase, leading upwards. Unto, holding up the lantern, commenced the ascent followed by his companions, and after some time they found themselves stopped by a flat substance overhead where the stairs terminated. This Unto rightly supposed to be a trap door, and planting his strong old shoulders under it, he exerted his strength, and the heavy iron slab or door which closed the opening gave way and turned on its rusty hinges, disclosing to Unto's view a small turret room, in a corner of which he saw, by the light of his lamp and a glimmer of moonlight shining through a narrow loop hole in the wall—Major Gordon, reclining on a native tape-woven charpoy, apparently sound asleep.

'Unto' signed to Elsie to come forward—which she did—and he pointed out what he saw to her and the others as they came up silently—with bare feet—out of the passage and entered the room, without awakening Gordon. Unto thought to himself:—"What an opportunity this would have been for the rebels, had they known of this communication, but thanks be to 'Bhagwan' they do not."

Elsie whispered to them to sit down quietly in the shadow, which they did, while she noiselessly advanced and stood over her sleeping husband, eyeing him with feelings of affection and heart-felt love.

Her proximity seemed to be known to him, even in his sleep, for she heard him mutter her name, and say:—"My poor, poor wife, I wonder what has been her fate; I acted against my judgment when I permitted her to remain outside; her unselfishness and love for me may lead the Rane—if she discovers her—to avenge herself on her."

After a few restless movements the exciting nature of his dream, or perhaps an intuitive perception of the nearness to him of a beloved object, appeared to arouse him from sleep; for he awoke, and, on opening his eyes, to his astonishment he saw the figure of his wife standing over him. He gazed at

it, wondering whether he was really awake or still dreaming; then the thought passed through his mind that his visitor was the departed spirit of Elsie, come to warn him of her death; but as his vision grew clearer, and as he looked attentively and fixedly on her well-remembered familiar features, their look of fond affection dispelled this illusion, and he awoke to the reality that Elsie herself, in her natural bodily form, stood before him. His first words were:—"Thank God it is not a dream; and you are really alive and spared to me, Elsie. I feared the worst." Elsie responded to these words by a silent but fervent and loving embrace.

The meeting of the husband and wife, though we have endeavoured to depict it, can perhaps be better imagined than described; it suffices to say, it was of the most cordial and affectionate nature.

Unto and his sons were then called forward, and Elsie explained the object of their visit and how it had been effected and proceeded to urge and press Gordon to leave the Fort with them before it was too late to do so.

He, however, felt that without the concurrence of McLeod this was impossible; and having awaked 'Budrōo,' who was sleeping outside his door, he told him to go and give a note—which he hastily penned—to McLeod and Dr. Bailie, in which he asked them to come to him at once, on business of importance.

They were not long in arriving, and were greatly surprised on seeing the party then assembled in Gordon's room or turret.

Gordon, having afforded an explanation as to what had happened, and how his midnight visitors had obtained access to him, then mentioned the object with which they had come, saying:—"I think, McLeod, either you or I should, if possible, leave the Fort, and try and open out communication with Sangor, Gwalior, or some such place from where there is hope of obtaining assistance, so that, at any rate, the Government may be made aware of our perilous situation. I am well

enough now and willing to go, but leave it to you to decide what is best."

McLeod, after considering what Gordon had suggested, said:—"I hardly think it would do for me to leave the Fort, it would look as if I were forsaking my charge, and might be misconstrued; and, indeed, I could not leave my wife and children; but with you it is different, and I quite agree with you as to the desirability of trying to open communication with places where there are British troops. So I think it best that you should go, and to prevent any misunderstanding, I will give you a written order to the effect that I consider it your duty to leave the Fort, and do what you can for us outside it. What do you think, Bailie, what is your advice in the matter?"

Bailie replied:—"I quite concur with you, and I think, now that Gordon's wound has so favourably progressed, it will not hinder his taking the active part you wish him to."

It was then decided that Gordon and his escort should leave the Fort at once; and McLeod, taking a cordial and kind farewell, said:—"We may never meet again, Gordon, but we shall always have the satisfaction of knowing that we have done our duty." Bailie also wished him good-bye, but before leaving, he said:—"There is one thing I would like to propose to you Gordon, and that is, that my daughter Kate should accompany you; I do so wish to get her out of this horrid Fort. I do not hide from you that I do not believe any of us will be permitted to leave it alive, and I would like to give her a chance, poor girl. If you can get her to Bombay, she can go home and join her mother. I will give her a credit on my banker at Bombay. What do you say?"

Elsie here stepped forward, and said:—"Doctor, trust your daughter to me, I will befriend her; anything is better than that she should remain here."

Bailie thanked her cordially, and it was decided that Kate Bailie was to join the party. She shortly after appeared with a small bag in her hand, and though deeply feeling the parting

with her father, she expressed her willingness to trust herself to Gordon and Elsie's care, and take her chance with them.

The party (with little Budrōo, who had volunteered to accompany it) then commenced descending the stone passage, and in due course of time arrived at the bottom of it and again entered the vaulted room.

Elsie there produced from a bundle she had brought with her, two white sheets or chaddars, which she threw over herself and Kate Bailie, which covered them from head to foot and served as a disguise. Gordon also dressed himself in a native dress, supplied by the forethought of his wife, taking, however, his own clothes with him, tied up in a bundle.

The party then left the vaulted room, carefully closing the door after them, and the two ponies having been prepared and led out by Puggo and Buggo, Elsie and Kate Bailie were mounted on one of them, and Gordon on the other, and the little party started at a good pace and were well on their way, long before day broke, on the road leading in the direction of the Jogee's Cave, where Uuto had decided to take them as the safest hiding place he knew of.

We must now ask our readers to return with us to Bolanath, who, it will be remembered, we left in a sound slumber in the Chabutra of the Jogee's Cave. When he awoke, which he did after a refreshing sleep of several hours, he sat up and looked about him.

As the reader has no doubt discovered, Bolanath was as consummate a rascal as ever trod this earth, intensely selfish in his nature, and caring for nothing but what would benefit himself. He was careless of, and callous to the sufferings of others, but at the same time he was a bit of a fatalist, at any rate in material matters. He thought that man perhaps, in the minor details of life, had a certain amount of free will, and power to exercise it, but he believed that the more important events were decided by fate and could not be changed by human agency or endeavour. So when he awoke from his long sleep, he began carefully to consider his present cir-

cumstances, and to view in retrospect the occurrences of the last few days, and thoughts somewhat to the following effect passed through his mind.

"Things might have been worse with me than they are, for it is evident that there is no intention of taking my life, which would, no doubt, have been in danger had I either remained in jail, or (God forbid) fallen into the hands of that she-devil, Rane Luchme Bhie. My jailors, though rough, uneducated jungly fellows, have a look of honesty about them, and I am inclined to believe what they tell me, that I had better remain quiet and not attempt to escape." Here he gave an enquiring and somewhat nervous glance at Kullo and Bajo, who were basking in the sun at the door of the cave.

"I will now, however, cook myself a few Chapatees, and prepare a dish of Dhal to eat with them, for I see my jungly friends have left the materials for this at hand."

He then began to blow up the smouldering embers of the fire, which had been left purposely in a corner of the cave, and he was soon engaged in the interesting occupation of preparing himself a mid-day meal—for he had slept until that time. While so occupied, he heard footsteps approaching, and shortly after Unto's wife entered and placed a lota of fresh milk before him, saying :—"Is there anything more I can bring you ?" Bolanath thanked her and said "no ; I have all I want, but I should much like to know to whom I am indebted for so much kindness, and who are my friends of yesterday ?" Lanche replied :—"My husband and sons—I need not hide this from you—are about their usual work, but I am forbidden to give you any information connected with outside, so do not ask me. I am here, however, to attend to your wants and to bring you anything you may require in the way of food, as also to feed Kullo and Bajo, which you see I have done." Bolanath did not attempt to continue the conversation, and Lanche then left him.

Taking up the lota of milk Bolanath remarked to himself :

"I hardly think it is right that I should drink milk brought by the hand of a person of no caste, which evidently my female jailor is, but 'necessity has no laws,' and no one will be a bit the wiser, so here goes;" and with that he took a good pull at the lota and then began eating his Chapatees and Dhal, which by this time were ready, with the appetite of a hungry man.

Having satisfied himself, Bolanath chanced to look towards Bajo, and seeing that he had also finished his meal and was watching Bolanath with a wistful look, the latter thought it would not be a bad plan to make friends, under present circumstances, even with a dog, and more particularly when that dog had so much in his power in connection with his being able to quit his confinement. So he threw Bajo a good big piece of Chapatee. At first the dog viewed the offering apparently with some degree of suspicion, for he turned it over several times with his nose, then smelt it all over, but eventually took it between his paws, held it firmly on the ground and began eating it, at the same time every now and then taking a side look at Bolanath, as if he did not quite know whether he was to be trusted or not.

Bolanath thought, "I have so far succeeded in making a friend of one of my jailors; I wonder if he would object to my passing him, and getting nearer the entrance, so as to breathe a little more fresh air? I must, however, take care not to go too near or within chain's length of my other jailor, Kullo I think they said was his name—at any rate not until I have come to secure a friendly understanding with him also Saying this to himself he threw Bajo another piece of Chapatee, with an extra lump of Dhal on it, and when he saw Bajo treating this in the same way as the first, he got up and slowly advanced towards him, as if he considered it as a matter of course that Bajo's friendship had been secured and that he was at liberty to pass him without molestation. He was, however, mistaken in this, for Bajo at once ceased from the operation of eating the piece of Chapa-

tee, but still holding it between his paws viewed Bolanath apparently with some degree of suspicion, for he turned up his lips in a way that gave him a sinister and evil expression of countenance and at the same time uttered a low angry growl, showing a formidable set of sharp, strong white teeth.

Bolanath had no difficulty in understanding the hint, which plainly said :—" Though I have no objection to amusing myself by eating whatever is freely given to me, yet I have no intention of betraying my trust for all that." So he resumed his seat again, saying aloud :—

" You thankless brute, you have not hesitated to accept a favour from me, but you are so devoid of gratitude as to be quite ready to tear me to pieces because I wish simply to go a little nearer the door to breathe fresh air. They call the dog the friend of man, you are at any rate no friend of mine ; you may be faithful to your master, but you are certainly most ungrateful as far as I am concerned, as yet, however there is no harm done. I shall bide my time, and it will go hard if Bolanath, the son of Bisnath, does not find some means of beguiling both you and your blood-thirsty spotted friend."

Several days had passed since Bolanath had taken up his unwilling residence in the Jogee's cave, and one morning he was, as usual, sitting on the chabutra, thinking over his affairs and endeavouring to see a way out of his difficulties, when to his surprise he saw coming out from the thick bushes surrounding the mouth of the cavern, a half-grown little porker or wild pig—having apparently strayed from its companions. It was sauntering along at leisure, carelessly turning up the loose ground, leaves, and grass, in search of food, as is the nature of its kind. As it approached the cave, (of the existence of which it appeared quite ignorant) the rustling noise it made as it came near attracted the attention and notice of Bajo and Kullo, as they were lying, as usual, at the entrance of it. The temptation proved too much for them and Bajo first giving way to it made a rush out in

the direction of the unclean animal. Kullo seeing this (though chained) made desperate efforts to follow, but for some time was held back by his chain. He, however, struggled so violently, throwing himself about and putting all his weight on the chain, that at last it gave way in the middle, where one of the links had been eaten half through by rust, and away went Kullo with half of it flying about his head and legs in close pursuit of Bajo and the porker.

The little pig was not long in realising the peril of his situation, and turning round scampered away at his best through the bushes, at a pace that tried to its full extent the speed and endurance of his pursuers. After about half-a-mile's chase, however, Bajo keeping in front of Kullo rolled piggie over, and Kullo soon coming up dug his sharp fangs deep into his throat and commenced sucking his life blood.

We shall now leave the two friends to enjoy their unusually luxurious repast and return to Bolanath, who saw his jailors disappear in the sudden way thus described with no small degree of satisfaction, remarking to himself—"Bolanath your good angel has at last remembered you, and has come to your assistance. The time for escape has arrived," and taking a farewell glance at his late prison and gathering his garments around him he stepped out quickly and made his way down the side of the hill by the path by which he had been conducted up by Unto and his sons some days before. Having arrived at the bottom of the hill he made off as fast as he could, trusting in time to come to some habitation where he could ask for information, as to where he was, and ascertain in what direction he should proceed so as to strike the road to Cawnpore. He anticipated no difficulty in doing this as he still had the money given him by Bukshish Alle, and he knew that with it he could hire a pony and cart and procure such food as he required.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WE must now leave Bolanath for the present to pursue his way, and return to the party who were *en route* from the Fort of Ranepore to the Jogee's cave, from which Bolanath had as described effected his escape.

The little party did not travel quite so speedily as Unto and his sons did when escorting Bolanath as a prisoner on the same road some time before, but they reached the foot of the hill late on the evening of the day after they had started, and Unto addressing Gordon, said :—" I sent Buggo on before—as you saw, Sahib—to tell my wife of our coming, so that she might prepare our hut for your reception to-night, as we have not made any preparations in the cave, in which you will be much safer than in my village of Gonde Gowla. Some arrangements must also be made about Bolanath. I do not think there will be any risk or danger in your remaining in the village for a day or two, as it is inhabited by Gondes only, and most are my relations and friends, and moreover, I am ' Malgozar ' of the village. To-morrow I intend dividing the Jogee's cave by mats into different rooms, so as to afford the ladies privacy, and I must also get up some ' Charpoys ' for you to sleep on, and make the place as comfortable as I can under the circumstances. Little Budrōo will help me, as he knows something of the ways and wants of the Sahib logue, and he also knows how to cook. Such cooking utensils as we have are, I need not say, at your disposal, and clean Teak tree leaves make good plates to eat off."

Gordon approved of the kind old man's plans, and said:—"Some day, Unto, I hope to be in a position to prove to you how we appreciate your faithful services."

Unto smiled, and remarked:—"I have served the Sahibs all my life, and many a rupee and bottle of good English brandy have I received from them. I should be ungrateful indeed, and like those cowardly, blood-thirsty 'Purbeas' who have slain their officers in cool blood, if I did not now do my best for my kind masters."

He then led the way to his hut which had been cleaned out, and in which his wife had made the best arrangements she could for the comfort of her unexpected guests. But Lanche evidently had something on her mind. Unto—who knew her ways well could easily see that, so he took an opportunity of saying to her—when out of hearing of his guests—"What is the matter old woman, do not fear to speak, for I know you have something to tell me?" Thus encouraged, Lanche said:—"Yes indeed Unto, I have, and I do not quite know what you will think of it. When I went up this morning—as is my custom—to take the 'Pumdit' his milk, I found, much to my astonishment, that Bajo and Kullo had disappeared—the latter had evidently broken his chain—and on looking into the cave I saw that the 'Pumdit' had also gone, for he was nowhere to be seen. To me this is quite unaccountable, neither Bajo nor Kullo would have left the cave unless tempted to do so in pursuit of some passing jungly animal."

Unto at first appeared disposed to look grave on hearing this communication from his wife, but after some consideration he said:—"In every evil there is always some good. It would have been necessary to remove Bolanath at any rate, and he has saved us that trouble by removing himself. It would not be much to be sorry for if he was removed to the next world. The only thing in the matter to be objected to is, that he now knows where the Jogee's cave is, but I don't think he is likely to trouble us much at present, as he has most probably had enough of it."

The next morning Unto made Bolanath's escape known to Gordon, who quite concurred with him that it was a good riddance of bad rubbish, and then accompanied Unto and his sons to the cave, taking his rifle with him which he had brought from Ranepore. Willing hands soon transformed the rough aspect of the Jogee's cave into some degree of comfort and cheerfulness. It was divided into three rooms, two bedrooms and one common sitting and dining room, by putting up bamboo mats of "wattle and daub," which were afterwards whitewashed, so as to give them a clean bright appearance. Charpoys roughly constructed, but springy and comfortable, and a table and chairs, or the best substitute that could be found for them, were also brought to the cave, and the floor was spread over with bamboo matting. Having finished their arrangements and accomplished their task, Unto, Gordon, and the two Gonde lads, Puggo and Buggo, returned to the village and escorted Kate Bailie, and Elsie with some degree of pride and satisfaction to take up their abode in their new residence. Kate had a little room for herself, and Gordon and his wife occupied the other sleeping room. The ladies expressed their surprise and gratification at the success attained in providing for their comfort and safety, and heartily thanked Unto and his sons. If there was no luxury, and if even some of the common conveniences of life were wanting to the occupants of the Jogee's cave, they experienced, what under the circumstances was of very much more value to them, a feeling of safety and rest, at least for a time, from anxiety and dread of instant calamity. Kate and Elsie became the greatest friends, and could their minds have been set at rest regarding the beleagured garrison they had left in the Fort at Ranepore, they would have even enjoyed the novelty of their circumstances and surroundings.

Two or three days had passed without any occurrence worth recording, and Gordon, Elsie and Kate were sitting enjoying the coolness of the morning, and expecting the arrival of Unto and Lanche with the usual supply of fresh

eggs, milk, butter, and honey, when Gordon addressing his companions, said:—

"It is high time we should attempt something for our friends in the Fort, and I have been thinking I will disguise myself and make my way in the direction of Gwalior or Cawnpore, with Puggo as a companion. I shall, of course, be guided by circumstances as to what I do and how I act, but my first endeavour must be to procure help—if possible—for our friends. What do you think of this plan, Elsie?"

His wife replied:—"I fear much your disguise would easily be discovered, for I imagine the strictest search is now being made for all Europeans by the rebels and mutineers. I think, my dear husband, that you had better let me first ascertain how things are going on, and where the English still hold power, and then you can put your plan into execution, and make direct for such place wherever it may be. Enquiries, if made by you, might create suspicion, and you would be discovered and killed; while I, as a native, would not be suspected. I think if I were to dress as a pilgrim proceeding to Banares, and take Puggo with me to represent my servant, I should not be molested, and am more likely to obtain such information as we require than you are. I should make my way to Gwalior or Cawnpore where I can be certain of getting it, on one of our little ponies, and Puggo and I would, I think, be able to return with news to you in five or six days." Gordon considered, and then said:—"I must have some time to decide; I cannot hide from myself that what you say is perfectly true, but I don't like exposing you to danger," then addressing Kate, he said:—"What do you think of what Elsie proposes?"

Kate replied:—"I do so wish we could all remain here until quieter times come, but I clearly see it is our duty to incur some risk, and do our very best for our friends and for my dear old loving father; I wish he was here with us. I am inclined to think Elsie's plan the best; but then my opinion is not worth much, is it?"

Gordon consulted Unto and his sons on the point, and at last, by their advice, decided on letting Elsie have her own way, and so she and Puggo set out on their perilous journey from the cave one fine morning, Elsie dressed in the clothing of a religious devotee proceeding on a pilgrimage to the Ganges, and Puggo leading her pony, and representing her servant and escort both in one.

Before starting, Gordon supplied Elsie with a money belt or "Busnee," containing gold mhurs, which she fastened round her waist for safety—for Gordon had taken the precaution of procuring these coins as being the most convenient to carry and conceal, before leaving Ranepore.

The reader will now accompany Elsie and Puggo on their journey, which, (as will be described), terminated so fatally for poor devoted Elsie. Their first day's journey was a pretty long one, and they covered over twenty miles, and found themselves well on the road to Cawnpore. That night they slept in a village called Mowha Kera, in a Baniah or grain seller's shop, and started the next day at dawn on their way, Towards evening they came to the village of Rāt, and made up their minds to sleep in a small Travellers' Rest House, about a quarter of a mile out of the village. Having tied up the pony, Elsie went inside, and told Puggo that she wished him to go into the village and bring her some flour, eggs, milk, and vegetables, so that she might prepare their evening meal, before going to rest; and Puggo started to do so. He had not gone more than ten minutes when no less a person than the reader's old acquaintance, Bolanath, entered the rest house from an opposite direction. At first he did not observe Elsie, who was sitting down; but he was not long in discovering who his companion was, and he then became aware that his long wished for revenge was within his reach. Elsie, who was very tired, did not particularly observe him, thinking him to be a traveller like herself come to occupy a place in the rest house for the night. A longing for vengeance for what he considered his wrongs became stronger and stronger in Bolanath's breast, and he muttered to himself:—

"An opportunity such as this only comes once in a lifetime; if I take advantage of it, I shall not only wreak vengeance on my enemies, but the probability is I shall also enrich myself, as it is not likely that Gordon's Mēm Sahiba would be travelling in disguise without being well supplied with money. I wonder where she is going? But this is not a time to enquire, it is enough that Bhawani has put her in my power."

Bolanath had bought a sword in a village during his wanderings, and he now congratulated himself on having done so. He rose, and watching a time when Elsie was looking in another direction, he stealthily and noiselessly stole up behind her, and delivered a well-directed blow with it on her head. She at once fell insensible, and then, at the sight of blood—which began to flow freely from the gaping wound—the savage nature of Bolanath was still more aroused and excited, and he slashed and cut his unfortunate victim until his arm grew tired. He then stooped down and removed the bag of gold which was tied round Elsie's waist (as the reader may remember) and taking the pony which was secured outside, he sprang on the little animal's back, and urging it into a round gallop, made off as quickly as he could from the vicinity of the village.

All this occupied but a few minutes, and Bolanath soon succeeded in leaving the scene of his blood-thirsty crime and the village of Rāt far behind him.

Puggo was some time before he returned, as he had to collect some dry sticks for a fire, and was also detained a little time in getting from the Baniah what he required.

When the poor fellow came back the reader may easily imagine his state of terror and agitation on seeing his charge lying apparently dead inside the rest house. He stooped down and placed his hand on Elsie's heart but perceived no pulsation or beat there. Some minutes elapsed before he began to realise what had really happened, and how he was situated; but he was aroused from his meditation by a

village watchman, whose beat lay in that direction approaching him, and who on seeing the murdered body of a woman lying covered with blood and Puggo standing over it, at once seized him, saying :—"You Budmash ! What have you done ? You have committed murder and robbery," and began pulling Puggo away in the direction of the village where he intended securing him. After having accompanied the watchman some paces Puggo realised the fact that circumstances were strongly against him, for he had been seen to come—with Elsie—through the village on their way to the rest house. He had been found standing over her murdered body alone, and with no other person present or near, and he at once saw that anything he could say in his defence would be of no avail, as it would be but natural to believe he was the perpetrator of the murder of his mistress, Elsie ; and he made up his mind that it would not do for him to be taken under these circumstances. He also remembered that it was his duty to Gordon to inform him of what had occurred. So with one blow of his Kalhare—which the watchman had neglected to deprive him of, and which was indeed hid under his clothes—Puggo felled him to the ground, and leaving him there apparently senseless, took to his heels and retraced his steps towards Gonde Gowla, taking the precaution however of skirting the village of Rāt instead of passing through it as he and Elsie had done on arrival a short time before. It took him two days to get home, and he arrived in the evening looking the very ghost of the strong, stalwart young Gonde who had left Gonde Gowla four days before.

He found his father engaged in ploughing a small field near his hut, and Unto at once—on seeing him—became aware that some terrible mishap had occurred.

Poor Puggo staggered up to his father, but just as he reached him nature gave way with him, and he fainted and would have fallen on the ground had not Unto caught him in his strong old arms and prevented his doing so.

Unto having placed his son in a recumbent position,

splashed cold water over his face, and Puggo shortly after came to his senses. "Speak my son," said Unto, "and say what dire mishap has befallen you and your charge?" Puggo having pulled himself together related his having found Elsie murdered in the rest house at Rāt, as well as all the circumstances with which the reader has been already made aware of.

The tears long unknown to the weather-beaten cheeks of the old man began to steal down copiously as he listened to his son's tragic story, and for some time he remained sadly silent. But he shortly remembered that it was his sorrowful task to impart his information to his friend and master, and he then said :—"Who, oh! who is to tell Gordon Sahib of this? I feel I cannot."

Puggo suggested that the Mēm Sahiba (Kate Bailie) should first be told, and that she should break the sad news to Gordon, and this plan was decided on.

Unto and Puggo (having screwed up their courage) went the next morning to the Jogee's cave to try and obtain an interview with Kate Bailie without the presence of Gordon.

On arrival they congratulated themselves on seeing her sitting outside the cave, under the shade of a Mowha tree, enjoying the cool, refreshing morning air. She was in company of a little Gonde girl—a niece of Unto's—of the name of Chunne, whom Unto, at the request of Gordon, had sent (for propriety sake) as an attendant on Kate when Elsie had left the cave. Chunne was but twelve years old, but she was intelligent and bright looking, and though she could not speak a language understood by Kate, yet they managed to communicate and make each other understand by signs and gestures, and Kate amused herself by teaching Chunne a few words of English, while she herself picked up a little of Chunne's language; indeed, the only one she could speak, Gonde.

On seeing the two Gondes approach, Kate told them, as well as she was able, that Gordon had gone out with his rifle

on hearing the cry of a spotted deer in the jungle not far off, in the hopes of being able to supply some venison for their larder. He had left her in charge of Chunne and little Budrōo, telling them to watch the path up to the cave, and in the event of any but friends coming, to conceal Kate out of view, and to await his return. On seeing Unto and his son, Budrōo joined them and accompanied them to where Kate was sitting. She at once saw that there was something wrong by the excited looks of the Gondes.

Kate could not speak much Hindostani, but could to a great extent understand what was said to her, and Budrōo was not a bad interpreter in his way. So it was not long before Kate was made aware of the unhappy fate of her friend. She was naturally much shocked, and for a time became hysterical, but seeing the necessity of calming herself, for poor Gordon's sake, she told Unto and his son to go and remain some little distance off, hid in the jungle, but near enough to be at hand if Gordon wanted them; and then, most unwillingly—as the reader may imagine—undertook the sad task of making him acquainted with his loss.

Gordon had been unsuccessful in finding game, and not liking to leave Kate long by herself, returned quicker than she expected. He had no sooner sat down to rest himself after his exertion than Kate, making up her mind to get her task over, went up to him, and taking his hand in both hers, said —while the tears rolled down her cheeks:—"Dear brother, for such you will ever be to me, prepare yourself as best you can to bear the saddest news of your life."

Elsie's danger was never absent from Gordon's mind, and he at once knew something had happened to her, and nerving himself to the utmost, he said:—"Is it Elsie? If so, tell me the worst at once; anything is better than suspense." Kate for a time in tearful silence pressed her friend's hand, and then, with bitter sobs, told Gordon that in this world he would never again see his wife.

Gordon hid his face in his hands, and for a short space

of time was silent; but Kate could see by the heaving of his breast and the visible signs of the struggle he made to suppress his bitter sorrow, how deeply he felt his loss.

After a lapse of several minutes, Gordon said:—"I am now prepared to hear particulars, dear Kate; tell me all you know, and how you know it."

Kate told him as best she could what she had gathered from Unto and Puggo, and then said:—"Unto and his son are within call, I will send for them." She then beckoned to Budrōo to call them, and shortly after they made their appearance. It is not necessary to repeat their conversation with Gordon, suffice it to say they told him all they knew.

CHAPTER XXV.

WE must now leave our friends in the Jogee's cave for a time, and return to those beleaguered and almost despairing of help, in the Fort of Ranepore.

When Gordon left them it appeared to all as if their hopes of succour were at the lowest ebb, for in him they had learned to recognise a leader and one of determination and indomitable courage, as well as of great resource and ability. They all well knew he would never forsake them, or their cause, and that the only reason he had left the Fort was to endeavour to procure aid for them. But after a lengthened period had passed, and nothing was heard of him or their rescue, the hopes of all fell to zero, and despair took possession of their minds.

Reports of the tragic fate of Ross and Erskine began to spread among them, notwithstanding McLeod's endeavours to keep them ignorant of the cold-blooded murder of these unfortunate gentlemen. Daily attacks were made on the Fort aided by cannon, and though these were not successful, they showed the determination of the rebels to succeed in the end. Food also (except wheaten flour) had become scarce, and altogether the state of the small garrison was all but hopeless.

It was at this time that a proposal on the part of the Rane and the Ressaldar Fyzalli, was again made to Colonel McLeod that the Fort should be surrendered to them, and a solemn promise was given that the party in it should be safely and honourably escorted to Sangor, a station where

the British community, with some European artillery—though confined in the old Fort of that place—still held their own.

This offer, after some hesitation, was at first refused, and several depressing days passed without any unusual occurrence taking place.

One morning a man was seen advancing towards the Fort holding out a white flag as a sign that he wished to communicate with the garrison. Colonel McLeod and Dr. Bailie, who were standing together on a Bastion, observed that this person was the native Sub-assistant Surgeon attached to the civil station of Ranepore, and consequently Dr. Bailie's subordinate. His name was Abdul Rahman and he was well known to Colonel McLeod, for he had on various occasions under Dr. Bailie's orders, during temporary indisposition, attended on him and his family, and Colonel McLeod always considered him an honest and obliging man, and one who could be trusted.

On recognising him Colonel McLeod signed to him to approach, and on his doing so, and standing under the wall of the Fort, addressed him, and said :—"I am truly glad to see you Abdul Rahman, for I feel that you will tell us nothing but the truth. Where have you been all this time ?"

Abdul Rhaman made a low salaam and replied :—"Oh, Sahib, it is indeed a sorrowful and unfortunate day that I see you in so sad a plight as to be confined to this Fort and surrounded by enemies. As you may remember, some months ago you, granted me leave to visit my home in the north-west of Hindostan, and it was only yesterday I returned to Ranepore, and alas ! found things in this deplorable state. I at once went to the Rane and the Ressaldar Fyzalli—now her right-hand man—and recommended that you should all be escorted to Sangor, from where you might be able to reach Bombay, and so get to England ; for it would be but unkind and untruthful to hide from you that Hindostan is all in a blaze; and that before long British Rule, now existing for just one hundred years, must terminate altogether. I represented

to them that injuring you could in no way forward their cause. They, however, told me that you had refused an offer of safe escort, and on learning this I have come to give my advice as an old friend and well-wisher to you, to reconsider your decision before it is too late. You know that what ever others may do, I would never deceive you. Do let me entreat you to take this last opportunity that is given you of escape from certain death."

"Bailie," said McLeod, turning to his companion, "I really think Abdul Rhaman is honest and truthful in what he says; he would not recommend us to trust the rebels unless he believed it was for our good. Do you not think it would be best to do as he proposes, after binding the leaders of the rebels, namely, the Rane, the Ressaldar and others, by solemn oaths to be true to their promises, and that we should then leave this detestable place and effect our escape. I fear Gordon has been unsuccessful or we should have heard from him ere this. It is our only chance, and if you are of the same opinion and agree with me, I will propose this to Abdul Rhaman?"

The pressure of anxiety and responsibility for the lives of all, and more particularly of the ladies and children, had of late weighed so heavily on Colonel McLeod's mind as to be almost unbearable. He had become quite unhinged by it, and escape from it, on any terms, and at any risk, he felt would be preferable to a continuance of this state of torture and suspense. He continued, still addressing his friend, "Death, if it is to come, would be preferred by me to this uncertainty and constant fear of what may happen."

Bailie expressed his concurrence in McLeod's views, saying he also believed in Abdul Rhaman's fidelity, and McLeod then addressing the Sub-assistant Surgeon, said:— "Abdul Rhaman, we have made up our minds to follow your advice—but you must get the Rane and other leaders of the rebellion to swear on the water of the Ganges and the Koran to let us go, and to escort us safely to Sangor. If they will

do this, to-morrow at this time, we shall be prepared to give up the Fort, and leave Ranepore."

Abdul Rhaman replied, "I am truly glad to hear your decision, and I think I can promise you that your wishes will be complied with."

He then respectfully took his leave, and went back by the way he had come. We shall accompany him. He went direct to the Palace of the Rane and was at once admitted to the reception room, where Luchme Bhie, Fyzalli Ressaldar, Laltabade, and our old acquaintance Bukshish Alle awaited his return, for it was by their instigation and at their desire that Abdul Rhaman had undertaken to carry the message—the reader is already aware of—to the garrison in the Fort. Fyzalli had been appointed Commander of the Ranepore army, and Laltabade his second in command, by the Rane, and Bukshish Alle held the important position of head of civil and judicial affairs in Ranepore, under the control of the Rane.

On the entry of the Sub-assistant Surgeon—who it should be mentioned had been appointed head of the Medical Department, both as concerned the rebel troops and the civil establishment — the assembled party turned to him with enquiring looks, and the Rane addressing him, said, "Well, Doctor Sahib—for you know you will for the future be entitled to that designation as head Hukēem of Ranepore and of my Court—have you been successful, and have you been able to persuade the Faringee Kaffirs to come out and give themselves up, or must we force our way into the Fort, sword in hand, and exterminate these ungodly dogs?" Abdul Rhaman made a low obesiance, and crossing his arms on his breast, said—"Protectress of the poor, your humble servant spoke sweet words of friendship to the Sahibs, and after much persuasion they have agreed to surrender, but only on condition that you and others bind yourselves by oaths on 'Gunga Pani' and the Koran that they shall be safely escorted in all honour to 'Sangor;' this I have agreed

to, and to-morrow the gates will be opened and the Fort will be yours. Have I done well?"

Luchme Bhie could ill conceal her satisfaction on hearing this statement, and she said "You had our commands to use every deceit and fraud to accomplish so desirable an end as that of getting these Faringees into our hands, and such promises if even made on 'Gunga Pani,' or the 'Koran,' would in no way be binding, when made under such circumstances to 'Kaffirs,' so you were quite justified in promising as you did. When they come out they must be put to death, and not even a child of the obnoxious vermin permitted to live."

Then turning to the assembly, she exclaimed in frenzied accents, "Do I say right my friends, do they not all deserve to die?"

Her audience expressed by gestures of assent their concurrence in her murderous designs, for they well knew that now matters had gone too far for hesitation or withdrawal; and though one or two of them, would, perhaps have preferred letting the beleagured garrison escape, they thought it useless to give expression to their feelings, knowing that with Luchme Bhie the words mercy or forgiveness were unknown.

Poor faithful Gunga who was in attendance, as usual, on her mistress, learned with feelings of horror the proposed treachery intended to her friends, but she was—as the reader knows—aware that Gordon and Elsie had left the Fort, and she felt at a loss how to communicate with those in it, but she made up her mind to do so if possible.

The Rane added in a calmer mood "I cannot go myself to the Fort to-morrow, but I will execute and sign a written promise and swear to the truth of it on Ganges water, and it will be presented to the Commissioner by old Balmukind Shastree, who is well known to the Sahibs. Of course, he must not know what our intention is with regard to the death of the Sahibs, as the old man would think it necessary to object and oppose our decision—but his presenting the

document, as he is believed to be very honest and holy, will in some degree be a guarantee to the Sahibs for its fulfilment."

The assembly having come to the diabolical decision above related, broke up, and the members of it dispersed (with the exception of the Rane) to meet under the walls of the Fort the following morning.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE fatal morning of the 8th of June, 1857, broke on Ranepore with a malign aspect, and evil forebodings to the band of devoted men and helpless women and children—numbering in all 64 souls—beleagured and imprisoned within the walls of the famous old Fort of that city.

Adverse and baneful influences, the demons of bloodshed, rapine, malice, and red-handed murder, pervaded the air.

The powers of the good spirits representing love, charity, sympathy, generosity, and mercy—whose willing vocation and duty it is to help, comfort and render aid and assistance to mankind in the difficulties and dangers which so persistently beset all, and which are inseparable from their earthly pilgrimage through this fickle and capricious, though beautiful and frequently joyous world of ours—were for the time paralysed, and in helpless grief they veiled their eyes, to shut out from view the blood-stained and brutal scenes so soon to be enacted before them, but which for some good reason, only known to the Creator, they were incapable of preventing or interfering with.

The atmosphere was lowering and sombre, for the monsoon or rainy season was nigh, and its forerunner, a bank of ink-black clouds, stood up like a dark and gloomy wall, a pall-like prototype of calamity and of death.

To add to the weird aspect of the morning, these dark masses were ever and anon illuminated by bright flashes of vivid fork lightning, which for a moment lit up the sky, and showed—as if in a spectroscope—every tint and distribution

of shade and colouring, in the murky mass of vapour, overshadowing the illfated city of Ranepore.

Many and anxious were the thoughts that passed through the over-wrought minds of the unfortunate occupiers of the Fort, and many a heart beat quickly with new hopes, alas, never to be realised in this world, when Colonel McLeod informed them that he contemplated making terms with the rebels, and that on the morrow they were to commence their perilous journey to seek a place of safety where, at any rate, they might expect to find peace and protection, to which they had been for weeks strangers.

Those of a sanguine temperament, and of those there were not a few, became very hopeful and even joyous, at the prospect of leaving a place now become hateful; others—particularly those who knew native character well—experienced no such feelings. They could not hide from themselves the but too apparent truth, that after matters had gone so far as they had, and after European officers had been shot down in cool blood by their men, it was to say the least of it, highly improbable that the rebels would run the risk of leaving a living witness to testify to their misdeeds should the British ever again become supreme.

But one and all felt that death would be preferable to a continuance of the state of suspense, amounting almost to torture which they were now undergoing.

When McLeod told his wife of the arrangements he had made, she said, encircling his neck with her loving arms and resting her head on his breast, "My dearest husband, I have the most implicit trust in all you do, but I have a sad foreboding of evil; you know members of the Macbean family have—for I have often told you—in positions of danger and approaching death the old Highland gift of second sight, and last night as I lay awake, thinking over our desperate circumstances, an ill-omened vision passed before me.

"You and I, or at least two figures closely resembling us, appeared to be walking together in one of the beautiful well

remembered mountain passes of my native glen in dear old Scotland—

"The sun was shining brightly, and the fragrant and familiar smell of birch and fir trees impregnated the air.

"The blooming purple heather waved in the gentle breeze on the hill sides, and to me life seemed Paradise—

"But suddenly the scene changed, heavy black clouds rolled over the mountains, a blood red atmosphere replaced that which I have described; the clouds burst—in loud claps of thunder and flashes of lightning over our heads—torrents ran down the sides of the mountains—and locked in each others arms we were borne away into the loch, which, now covered with white crested waves, foamed and boiled below.

"The vision passed away from my sight, but it will never pass from my memory. I would rather die, a thousand times, than fall into the hands of the rebels, should they mean treachery. Promise me, my dear husband, that if such be the case (and should opportunity offer) you will end my life with your own loving hand, rather than let me run the chance of dishonour."

McLeod, much affected, replied: "dearest Jessie, man proposes, but the Great Ruler of the universe disposes all things; I have acted to the best of my ability, and can do no more. I will not hide from you that I have many serious misgivings as to the wisdom of trusting the rebels, I feel very doubtful whether they will keep faith with us or not, and I have no hesitation in assuring you, that I would not scruple to deprive you of that life, which I consider my dearest possession in the world—even with my own hand—rather than let you suffer dishonour at the hands of our enemies—I would then soon follow you myself; but I hold that with the prospect of escape held out to us, small indeed as it is, I am not justified in resorting to so fearful a remedy. We will hope for the best, and trust in the Great Spirit who never deserts even the most helpless."

This trying interview occurred just as day was breaking,

and McLeod, having affectionately embraced and kissed his wife, left her, to meet the deputation from the rebels, now seen approaching.

It consisted of Balmukind Shastri, who came delegated by the Rane, and bearing her written promise of safety and escort (and which, the reader should be made aware, he believed in most implicitly). Then came Fyzalli Ressaldar, Bukshish Alle, Laltabade, and others.

On nearing the Fort, it took up a position under the walls, where the meeting had taken place the day before, with Abdul Rhaman — who also accompanied the party — and McLeod and Dr. Bailie and several of the garrison appeared on the Bastion overlooking the delegates.

Abdul Rhaman, addressing McLeod, said, "Sahib, we have come according to promise, and we are prepared to take oath on what we hold most sacred, that the Sahibs, and their Mēm Sahibs, shall be safely conducted by us in all honour to Saugor."

"Kazee Azeez o' Deen will administer the oath to us Musulmans on the Koran, and Balmukind Shastri to the Hindoos on Gunga Pani. He also brings the Rane's written promise sworn to by her."

"A mounted escort has been prepared, and palanquins and carts are ready for the ladies and children."

McLeod replied—"Abdul Rhaman, we are prepared to perform our part of the bargain, but I should like it to be understood, that though at present we are not in a position to reward those who befriend us, the time may come, indeed, I may say will certainly come, when the British Government will not fail liberally to recompense those who, in this our great need, render us aid and assistance."

Azeez o' Deen then commenced reading out a statement to the following effect :—

"We, the undersigned, hereby agree and swear by our religion, that on the Sahibs now holding possession of the Fort of Ranepore giving up their arms, and opening the

gates to us, we will afford them safe and honourable protection and escort to Saugor.

"Sworn by the Mahomedans on the Koran, and Hindoos on Gunga Pani, and we, in proof of our truth and faithfulness, do each individually attach our signet rings,

Deen, Deen, Deen,

"Long live the King of Delhi and the Rane of Ranepore. The people belong to God, the country belongs to the King, and the two religions are to govern all."

The ceremony of swearing was then gone through, and the signet rings of each deponent were attached to this document.

The wording and spirit of it did not certainly go far to reassure those who heard it read, and even at the last there was much doubt and hesitation and considerable difference of opinion regarding the wisdom of surrendering, but the matter was eventually settled by being put to the vote, and it was carried by only a small majority, that they should open the gates, and trust to the sworn word of their enemies.

So at about noon, all having prepared what they intended taking with them in small hand bundles, they collected together at the outer gate of the Fort. It was opened, and a sad and woebegone assembly of men, women, and children passed out of it into the streets of Ranepore. No sooner had it done so, than a strong guard of rebels marched in, and the gate was at once closed.

Another party of insurgents under the leadership of Bukshish Alle seized and bound the too trusting and unfortunate garrison, who now, though too late, realised the fact that they were betrayed, and doomed to a cruel death.

"Loud cries of "Deen, Deen," and "Kill the Kaffirs," filled the air in all directions, and under the escort of the late jailor and his "Burkin duzes," the ill-fated party were marched off outside the city to a place called "Jokin Bagh." On arrival there a sawar or mounted trooper of the Irregular Cavalry Regiment came up in hot haste and exclaimed;—

"It is the orders of the Rane Luchmie Bhie and Ressaldar Sahib that the Faringee lague are to be killed." The ladies were then separated from the gentlemen, and the poor little children from them, and Bukshish Alle, stepping forward and addressing Colonel McLeod, said, "Son of an unbelieving dog, and of a defiled mother, did you really think that a follower of the true religion was to be bound to you by oaths or promises, even of the most sacred nature? Know that the rule of the cursed Faringees has come to an end, and their tyranny and oppression have for ever ceased."

Saying this he struck McLeod on the face with his slipper, and spat on the ground in front of him, thereby offering him the greatest indignity his ignoble mind could conceive.

Poor McLeod being bound was quite helpless, and could only show by his looks how deeply he felt his degradation, but the hot Highland blood of his wife, who was an unwilling witness to what had occurred, boiled in her veins. She could brook it no longer, and pushing forward in spite of the hold of those guarding her, she looked Bukshish Alle boldly in the face, and said:—

"You coward, well do you know if the Sahib were free and at liberty how soon he would revenge himself on you. Why do you insult him? I, his wife, beg rather that you will take his life than that. Do so; we do not fear death, but we do dishonour and disgrace!"

Bukshish Alle, frenzied with rage at being addressed in this way by a woman, who he expected would rather have cringed and supplicated for mercy, at once commenced the work of slaughter by cutting down McLeod with his own hand; and one of the bravest and truest gentlemen of the age fell fearlessly, and without even a groan, met his untimely death. The ladies, the gentlemen, and the children were then stabbed and cut to pieces by the infuriated and bloodthirsty mob, which in several instances vented its rage and hatred, by hellish acts of cruelty almost unheard of, seizing helpless infants and children by the limbs, and—even before

their mothers' eyes—dashing out their brains against the stone wall surrounding the garden where the massacre took place. But we forbear further description of horrors such as these, and draw a veil over the scene of blood and fiend-like cruelty, too dreadful to contemplate, even at this distant period of time.

That day of horror had passed, night had at last set in, and there lay, stark and ghastly in the pale moonlight, sixty-four gory stiffened corpses, now the sole occupants of the unholy spot, where the fearful drama of blood and merciless murder had so lately been enacted. A silvery light shone on the upturned pale faces of the dead. They now felt no pang of pain or sorrow, no tremor of fear; their spirits having thrown off their earthly mantles, had passed from this world of care and anxiety, to awake in the light and joyous regions of the next.

The night had now also well nigh passed, when there came stealthily and silently, from the direction of the city of Ranepore, a body of from ten to fifteen men led by a woman. That woman was the reader's old acquaintance, Gunga. On nearing the scene of slaughter, she stopped, and signed to her companions to commence their task, on which they began to take up and remove the dead bodies of the slain, and to place them side by side in the bottom of an old long-disused gravel pit, in the vicinity of 'Joken Bagh.'

After several hours of labour, this work was completed, and they then proceeded to cover over the last remains of the dead with earth. This also having been accomplished, and having been remunerated by Gunga for their labour, they departed in the same silent stealthy way they had come.

While in attendance on the Rane, her mistress, poor Gunga had been an unhappy witness to all that has been described above. She had made an attempt to communicate with the garrison in the Fort, but found the passage through the secret chamber, by which Gordon, Elsie, and Kate Bailie had been conducted by Unto, blocked up from the Fort side.

This had been done as a matter of precaution by McLeod's orders, so Gunga was unable to warn her friends of their danger, and of the treacherous designs of Luchme Bhie and her adherents. When all was over, she had managed to bribe a number of labourers to accompany her to 'Joken Bagh,' as above described, to bury her murdered friends, and so prevent the unseemly spectacle and disgrace of leaving their dead—and in many instances stripped—bodies exposed to public view. The men she employed, however, made it a part of the bargain that their assistance in this matter should be kept a secret, for they feared the Rane and her followers might disapprove, and that they might come under displeasure. So that it was never known what friendly hands paid the last marks of respect to the murdered remains of the ill-fated garrison, by placing them under the earth. The Rane and those connected with her were too much pleased with their success to trouble themselves about the matter.

So, thus the silent dead lay, if not in all honour, at least undisturbed and unmolested in their humble resting place, until the air around it awoke to the loud crash of cannon, and the deep-toned thrilling rattle of musketry, intermingled with cheers, and cries for vengeance from their gallant countrymen, intent on avenging their cruel death, on the now trembling and repentant foe—just one year after the events above described had occurred.

And when vengeance had been satisfied, and the narrow streets of Ranepore had run red with blood, mercy and humanity again took the place of revenge and blood-shed, and the resting place of the dead was hallowed by having the impressive burial service of the Church of England read over it, by one of its ministers, in the presence of a British Army, arrayed in full dress, and accompanied by all the pomp and display of a military pageant.

After which a protecting wall was built, to shield the graves of our fellow country men and women, and protect

them from profanation; and a tablet to their memory was erected, to mark a spot quite as tragical and as well worthy a place in history as the well known blood-stained Well of Cawnpore.

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN time reports began to reach even the remotely situated village of Gonde Gowla that some dreadful calamity had happened at Ranepore. It was not known what, but the air was full of evil and terror instilling rumours. Unto mentioned this to Gordon, at the same time saying that he himself intended going and ascertaining the truth.

The monsoon had now set in with all its strength, and travelling was no easy matter, as many of even the small streams were swollen into torrents and almost impassable, but old Unto was no great respecter of weather, so, with Gordon's concurrence, he left his village early one morning, just a week after the Ranepore tragedy had been enacted. It took him two days to accomplish the journey, and on the evening of the second day he arrived at Ranepore. On entering the city he was not long in hearing what had happened, and Unto then felt as he had never felt before. Though a rough jungly fellow, familiar with death in all its forms, and little fearing it, his nature revolted at the unheard of barbarities he was told had been perpetrated on helpless women and innocent unoffending children. He sat down on the step of a deserted house, and hiding his face with his hands began to rock himself to and fro, in deep grief and sorrow.

After a time it came to his mind that the task—for the second time—of acquainting Gordon with dire misfortune had again fallen to him, and he began to say to himself:—"Oh, Unto, what unlucky star were you born under, which

causes you in your old age to be the sport of 'Bhuts' and evil spirits. Why rather was not the man-eating tigress of 'Kala Phār,' the devourer of the holy man, 'Khaki Bawa,' allowed to end your days when you lay helpless and quite at her mercy?

"Why on hundreds of occasions when your worthless life was in peril were you preserved from death—was it for this? The Burre Dew alone can tell, I cannot! But I now remember that my master Gordon Sahib told me to find and communicate with Gunga, and this I must do."

Unto then got up, and pulling himself together went towards the palace, in the vicinity of which he wandered about for two days without being able to see Gunga. On the morning of the third day, however, he ventured to enquire for her from one of the door keepers of the palace, and received an answer to the effect that she was ill of fever, and that her life was despaired of. So, full of troubles Unto again turned his steps, and not unwillingly, towards home.

On arriving at it he went straight to the Jogee's Cave, and performed the trying task of communicating his melancholy news to Gordon and Kate Bailie. The reader may easily imagine how this affected them, though to some extent their minds had been prepared for it by the reports we have already referred to, which had reached them from time to time.

But grief and sorrow, however severe, only last for a season. Gordon and Kate were young, and their elastic minds by degrees recovered their wonted cheerfulness, and their mutual sorrows and calamities appeared to draw them closer to each other in the bonds of sympathy and mutual dependence and affinity.

A period of several months had passed since the occurrence of the events above narrated. The cold, bright weather had commenced, but nothing of any great interest had taken place at Gonde Gowla or in the Jogee's Cave. Gordon and Kate, the only survivors of the Ranepore garrison, had re-

mained unmolested and unknown in their hiding place, protected and cared for by Unto and his family.

One crisp, clear, bright, bracing morning Unto appeared at the cave with a smile on his old hard-featured face, and said :—

"Sahib, I think our 'Kismat' is on the turn. I have just seen a 'Baniah,' or grain seller, who has been visiting his friends in Saugor, and he reports that he heard that troops had arrived in Bombay from England and also in Calcutta, that numbers of mutineer sepahees have been blown away from guns, and that before long there will be an advance made in this direction. Now, Sahib, I think you and the Mēm Sahiba might venture to leave the cave, and under our escort travel to a place of safety. You might be disguised as a cloth merchant travelling to Bombay, and the Mēm Sahiba might represent your wife." (Kate, who was listening, turned away her face to hide her blushes, but Unto, who was somewhat thick-skinned in such delicate matters, continued.) "We could, you know, travel by night, and put up in the day time in villages, in many of which I have friends. I long to see you in safety, for though I do not think it possible you will be discovered here—and if you were no one should approach you except over the dead bodies of me and my two sons—yet I cannot hide from myself that Gonde Gowla is too near Ranepore and its blood-thirsty ruler Rane, to be really a safe place to remain in longer than is absolutely necessary. So in a day or two when I can procure disguises, and good ponies, I propose we start."

Gordon quite concurred with Unto, for he longed to be up and doing again, and Kate trusted to him entirely, and expressed her satisfaction and willingness to commence her journey as soon as arrangements could be made.

So one fine moonlight night the party, consisting of Gordon, Kate, Unto, and his two sons, with little Budrōo and Chunee as personal attendants, left the protection of the friendly Jogee's Cave, and taking paths and byways well known to the

Gondes, halting by day, sometimes in villages and at others in the jungle, at last arrived at the grand old river Narbudda, which they crossed at Burman Ghāt, and were comparatively safe, for the tide of rebellion had not extended to any perceptible degree south of the Narbudda.

Gordon reported himself to the authorities and obtained permission to escort Kate Bailie to Bombay, after which he was to join a force which was to march towards Ranepore, and assume charge of that district when retaken by the troops. After a somewhat long and tedious journey—for the railway had not then been completed—the party reached Bombay, and having secured a passage for Kate Bailie in the *Nemisis* (one of the P. and O. steamers) Gordon bethought himself of returning to Central India to take part in the work of retaliation on those so richly deserving punishment.

Two days before the steamer was to sail Gordon and Kate were sitting together in the gardens of the hotel in which they were residing. It was the last day they were to pass together in India, and perhaps their separation might be for ever. They sat under the shade of a spreading Beaugonveller, the beautiful foliage of which was just turning from its natural green, into the lovely violet tint so peculiar to this shrub during the cooler months of the year. The sun had set, and twilight (always so short in the East) had commenced, and the cool sea breeze played refreshingly on them, after the heat and bustle of the day. They were the sole occupants of the retired and pleasant little garden, the air of which was full of the odours of sweet flowers and lime and orange blossom; and their hearts also were full of love and affection for each other. They were but too well aware of the intensity of their feelings, but neither felt inclined to speak, a gentle pressure of the hand, and quickened throbbing of the pulse, were all the outward signs of what was passing in their minds.

These feelings were becoming almost painfully intense, and

at last Gordon felt that he must 'speak or forever hold his peace.' So, taking heart of grace, and looking his charming companion in the face, as their eyes met, he whispered the short but significant sentence, "Kate, do you love me?" These simple loving words had no sooner—from the fulness of his heart—found utterance, than, as if touched by a magic wand, all feelings of restraint vanished, like a passing cloud, and Kate no longer able, or wishing to restrain her long pent up emotion, responded to the emphatic question put to her, by throwing herself on her lover's breast, and there we will leave the devoted pair, to recover themselves, and resume (as many similarly situated have done before them, and as no doubt many will do in the future) their wonted behaviour and usual outward bearing to each other.

In due course this desirable state of tranquility having been arrived at, it became necessary to discuss the realities of their situation, and Gordon then pleaded—and not unsuccessfully, that though it was evidently an absolute necessity that they should part for the present, and that Kate—after what she had undergone—should join her mother in England for a time, yet there was no good reason existing why she should not do so as his wife. It was true, he said, that the time was short (for the *Nemisis* sailed on the evening of the morrow) but if their time was made good use of, it was quite long enough, to bind them together for ever in this world. In short, he proposed that they should meet the next morning at the Church, when, with a special license—to be procured in the meantime by him—they should become man and wife and that after the ceremony Kate should proceed direct to the ship and to England alone, for Gordon had that day received peremptory orders to proceed at once to join a force under Sir Hector Ross detailed for service in Bundlekund, and which was to proceed shortly and re-capture the important city of Ranepore.

After all that had happened what could Kate do but say "yes," and she did so with a good grace, and heartfelt

pleasure, feeling that it was the only way she could secure her own happiness, and that of one whom she now loved most dearly in the world.

At the altar of one of the principal churches in Bombay, the morning following the day just described, Major Shalto Gordon and Kate Bailie met, accompanied by several acquaintances whom Gordon had invited to attend and witness their marriage. In the background there also stood a small group, dark in visage and somewhat uncouth in aspect, yet stauncher or truer friends it would be difficult nay, impossible, to find. This little band consisted (as the reader will no doubt have surmised) of old Unto and his two sons, who now decked out—at Gordon's express request and expense — looked as they had never looked before, and wondered much at their own appearance. By them also stood little Budrōo and the Gonde girl Chunne, the latter—it had been decided, was to accompany Kate to England as her attendant—probably the first of her class who ever crossed the "Kare Pani" or salt waters of the ocean. Gordon was dressed in uniform, which he had had made up in haste in Bombay, and Kate looked cool and lovely in simple white, a true emblem of her purity. The ceremony passed as such ceremonies do pass, and Gordon led his bride as had been before arranged, to a carriage which conveyed them on board the steamer which in two or three hours was to sail for Suez, where her passengers would leave her, and cross the Desert to Alexandria, where another steamship awaited to carry them to the hospitable shores of their native land, dear old England.

We shall not inflict on our readers a description of Gordon and Kate's parting. Suffice it to say, it was one in which pleasure and pain were much mixed; pleasure in that they felt they were now husband and wife, and that—God willing—they would patiently and hopefully await the future, and of course a certain amount of pain at parting under circumstances where the time of their being again united was so uncertain.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TWO months had passed since Gordon took his last fond and farewell look of his wife, as she gazed wistfully over the side of the *Nemisis*, and waved her handkerchief in adieu to him, as he was pulled ashore by four stout Bombay boatmen.

Since then, he had joined Sir Hector Ross's Column—as ordered—in a civil and political capacity. It was now marching on its way to blood-stained Ranepore, intent on unseating the Rane, and revenging the wholesale massacre of its country men and women, which had, as the reader knows, taken place there.

Unto and his sons had, at Gordon's request, recruited from among the Gondes of Central India, a body of 500 able, smart, brave young men; and Gordon had formed them into a small regiment, and had—as far as the time would permit—drilled and disciplined them, so as to make a very useful—if not showy—little corps of fighting men, able to undergo fatigue and hard work, and faithful and loyal to their salt. He intended, as matters quieted down, to use them as military police, for which purpose they were, perhaps, more fitted than for that of the usual police force of the country.

Gordon had been appointed in the place of his lamented friend, Colonel McLeod, to be Commissioner of the Ranepore Division, and he was to assume charge of this office on Ranepore being re-taken by the force which he now accompanied. It was not until the month of March that this force reached Ranepore, for it had been delayed for many reasons—the chief being the necessity of not leaving any fortified position

in its rear in possession of the rebels, and clearing the country of them as it advanced. There was also the difficulty of procuring supplies, in what might now be considered an enemy's country.

On the morning of the 21st March, as day began to break, bright and clear, with a cloudless azure blue sky, the well-remembered, lofty grey granite walls of the Fort of Ranepore appeared to the expectant eyes of Gordon, who was riding in company with Sir Hector Ross, some hundred yards ahead of the advance guard of the column. The halt was sounded on the bugle, and each regiment as it came up, placed itself in the position of formation pointed out to it by Staff Officers, bearing the orders of the General—an old and well-tried veteran of great experience, whose hair had grown white in the profession of arms, to which he had been passionately attached from his boyhood. Having satisfactorily arranged his forces to resist attack—should the rebels be foolhardy enough to attempt it—he advanced himself, accompanied by his Staff and an escort of British cavalry, and rode up near the walls of the city, to reconnoitre. Gordon, also, as one well acquainted with the locality, was requested to accompany him, and did so.

On nearing the ramparts of the town, the walls became lined with red-coated 'Sepahees,' who, though they had thrown off their allegiance to England, still, as if in mockery, wore her uniform, and national colour—possibly from convenience, long habit, or perhaps from some latent feeling of superstition or belief in a colour in which they had so often marched to victory, under the guidance of the officers now, alas!—by their act—lying cold and lifeless under the sod, and no longer capable of giving courage and strength, which they had never failed to do before, in times of danger and trial. On the little reconnoitring party coming as near the walls as prudence permitted it to do, it halted; and the rebels, then out of sheer bravado, sounded the bugle call "To Advance." Sir Hector good naturedly remarked to Gordon, who was

riding near him:—"I am sorry we cannot oblige our dusky friends just at the present moment; but we won't forget their invitation, when the time comes. Now let us ride round the town; I must select points and positions, so as to surround it entirely, for I am determined no one shall escape."

They were just starting, when they paused to observe what caused a commotion among a group of men standing on the central Bastion or citadel, on which the rebel flag had been planted, and hung suspended from a somewhat portentious bright coloured banner staff.

They saw, much to their amusement, step out among her followers, no less a person than Rane Luchme Bhie, the Queen of Bundlekund, as she was now in the habit of calling herself. The insolence of her gait and bearing, showed how much she was impressed with the importance of the position she had assumed. She was dressed more like a man than a woman. On her head she wore a bright-coloured turban, the upper part of her body was protected by a coat of light chain armour, which glittered and sparkled in the rays of the sun as she moved about; a pair of close-fitting trousers, such as were worn by Maharatta women, when they accompanied their husbands in forrays or warlike expeditions—with a pair of patent leather boots, coming up near her knees, completed her costume. She was girded with an embroidered belt, in which hung a diamond-hilted short sword, and in it were also stuck two silver-mounted antique pistols, and a handsome 'Pashe Kubs' or hand dagger. The general's party could see her distinctly, and she appeared interested in regarding it also, through a telescope.

Gordon's blood boiled as he recognised his old enemy, and recollected what had passed; but he contented himself by simply remarking to one of his companions:—"That is the Rane, the chief instigator of the massacre. I am glad to see that she is in the Fort, for now she cannot escape us."

After having fixed the different positions for pickets and

outposts, so as entirely to surround the town, the General and his staff returned to camp; and that day the town was entirely encompassed and surrounded, and the Siege of Ranepore commenced. The next morning, batteries of heavy guns were opened in two different places, so as to breach the walls—one of these was called the East, and the other the West Breaching Battery. The rebels, confident in the strength of the Fort and walls of the town—which latter were twenty-five feet high, and loopholed in every direction—did not appear disheartened in any way, for they also opened fire from the Fort and walls with their guns, though, from their inferior size and construction, as well as want of skill in using them, they did no great harm to the besiegers. Matters went on in this way for some time; the breaches in the walls of the Town, however, becoming daily more practicable, and the orders for storming were anxiously expected by the troops.

On the 1st of April, a report reached the General that a large body of rebels, under their leader Tantia Topee, had crossed the Jumna River, and was marching to the relief of Ranepore. As the reader is aware, the besieging army was much weakened by having so many men detached from it, to form a cordon round the city, which was four miles in circumference, and the advance of so large a force against it, when in that position, was a serious matter. A timid general, and one who had not confidence in himself and his men, would most probably have withdrawn his cordon of troops and consolidated his force to meet the advancing army, said to be 25,000 strong, but Sir Hector Ross was of different stuff. He left the surrounding force just as it was, and marched off with the remainder of his men, numbering but 4,500 in all to meet the enemy, who were as six to one.

On advancing some few miles he found the rebels drawn up in order of battle, outnumbering him in every branch of the service, but English pluck stood instead of numbers, and after a hammer and tongs affair with artillery, the enemy's flanks were turned; its artillery, holding a strong

position among huge boulders of rock, was captured by a desperate and gallant charge of horse, combined British and native irregular cavalry, in which many a saddle was emptied by the close and galling fire of the sepahees, lying down among and sheltered by the rocks and broken ground of their almost impregnable position, and many a brave dragoon bid his last farewell to his comrade as he yielded up his life on that dusty and blood-stained spot. Then it was that the rebel army was by a general advance of the whole British line driven pell mell into the almost dry bed of a river, in the most utter confusion and panic, and there mowed down by artillery in thousands.

Thus the attempted relief of the siege of Ranepore ended in disorder and the entire demoralisation of the rebel force. The next day the General decided that the city of Ranepore should be taken by storm. The experienced old soldier well knew that daybreak in the morning was the most favourable time to attack a native force, for then many of it are necessarily absent performing their morning ablutions and religious ceremonies requisite at that time, and it was consequently half an hour before day dawned that the two storming parties selected from the European regiments of the force marched off in silence towards the breaches in the walls—the sappers led by their officers carrying scaling ladders, which it was thought might be required, even though the breaches were pronounced to be practicable.

Just as it became light enough to discern a comrades' features in the ranks next to one, the word to "advance" was passed down the two columns in a whisper, with the hope of getting as near the walls as possible before drawing the fire of the enemy on them.

The attack had, however, been anticipated by the besieged, for as the stormers approached the breach made to the east side, a loud voice, and much to their surprise in English, too, was heard to say, "Too late, too late," and with that a sheet of flame burst out from the loop-holed wall and illuminated both besiegers and besieged as if it were day.

Silence now no longer necessary, with a loud ringing cheer, the forlorn hope rushed on, the sappers leading with the ladders on their shoulders, and when one dropped there was always another ready to take his place. The ladders were placed against the broken wall, notwithstanding the shower of missiles, boiling water, melted lead, scalding pitch, and such like substances being freely poured down on the devoted sappers carrying them, and then a desperate hand to hand contest, in which quarter was neither asked nor given, commenced at the top of the wall, and many a gallant heart fell lifeless from it, and bit the dust in agony at its foot.

Unfortunately the ladders at the western point of attack were found too short, and unwillingly the attacking party had to withdraw for a time, leaving one half its number lying dead under the wall.

On the east side, however, the storming party were more fortunate, for the walls had suffered more from the British fire, and after a time, notwithstanding a most desperate resistance, a small body of Europeans effected a landing on the rampart, inside the wall, and held it until joined by their comrades. On seeing this a panic took possession of the besieged, and they began to give way. A party then of the stormers at the point of the bayonet cleared the line of ramparts, and so the western attacking column again advanced their ladders, and now unopposed entered over the walls from which they had so short a time before been obliged—unwillingly, and with such severe loss, to retire. They were followed by a large body of the reserve waiting outside, and strong positions were secured in different parts of the town. An advance was then made on the Rane's palace, which was desperately defended by the rebels, some of them as they slowly retreated even strewing the floor with gunpowder, and on the rear approach of the British igniting it by firing their muskets into it, and so involving not only their enemies, but themselves also in destruction by being blown into the air or scorched and burnt to death.

The palace was at last in possession of the British, and most of the rebels driven back to the protection of the fort, when an incident took place worth mentioning as it shows how even the best and bravest troops may give way to sudden panic. This occurrence for some moments checked and even threatened to stop the advance altogether.

A loud voice was heard (it was never ascertained from whence it came) calling out in terror-stricken accents :—"Get out of the palace, boys ; its mined it is, and we are all going up."

On hearing this alarming intelligence, there was at first a pause, then a look to the rear, and then out went every man helter skelter, " The devil take the hindermost," until they all had gained the palace yard outside the building. There they stood looking in each others faces, with feelings of mingled shame, anger, and indignation, not only with the cause of their sudden retreat, but with themselves for giving way to panic.

It was then that one of the officers stepping forward, with a broad grin on his handsome Irish face, called out :—" Now sure, then County Down boys, and its being after joking ye are, the palace is no more mined than I am, unless, be jabbers, its a mine of gold muhurs ye're thinking of."

A loud hurrah and a rush in again quite as quick as the rush out had been a minute before was the result of this speech, and the red-coated British soldiers disappeared into the ill-fated building, like a pack of fox-hounds rushing into cover at the signal of the huntsman, and the palace was quickly cleared of its defenders.

All the city was now in the possession of the British, but a strong body of the rebels held the fort.

And thus closed that eventful day.

The next morning the General sent for the Engineer officers of the force, and called on them to propose a plan for the capture of the fort.

He was informed that the walls being much too high for escalading, the only practicable way was to blow in the gates with gunpowder and take it by storm, and Colonel Lethbridge, the chief Engineer officer of the force, added:— "There are two gates to be dealt with, the outer, situated at the entrance of a narrow, winding path, surrounded by a high strong wall, leading from it to the city wall, and the inner gate itself, so that an advance from the first gate, after it has been destroyed up to the inner one opening into the fort, would be open to the fire of the enemy from the whole breadth of the fort walls facing it on that side, and we must not blink the fact that the bill would be a bloody one indeed if this method of attack is adopted, and General," added Colonel Lethbridge, "You see the walls of the fort itself are of so massive a nature that the largest shot from our most powerful breaching guns make no impression, but fall down, leaving simply a whitish blue mark on the granite where they strike. The fort itself is built on a rock, and that precludes the possibility of mining."

The General having heard attentively what Colonel Lethbridge had said, replied, "Well, Colonel, you do not certainly place a particularly tempting programme before us, at any rate I must take a few days to consider, for it is very evident I cannot afford to lose any more men, and I quite agree with you that storming the fort by blowing in the gates would be a very sanguinary business. Perhaps the defeat the rebels have to-day suffered may so dishearten them, as to cause them to surrender or offer to do so, but even if they do I cannot and will not make terms with Luchmie Bhie or any one concerned in the murder of our countrymen and women."

The General then placed men so posted as to command all exits from the fort, as he thought, and drew the cordon of his pickets with which he had surrounded the city nearer to its walls. He felt very reluctant to resort to the only means that would place the fort at once in his hands, that of blowing in the gates, and in the meantime contented himself by

keeping up a constant fire of shells into it from his batteries, which made it anything but a pleasant abode for the garrison.

We must now ask the reader to accompany us to the apartment in the fort occupied by the Rane herself. Gunga had followed the fortunes of her mistress, not, as the reader knows from any feelings of love for her, but simply from the force of circumstances. She was standing behind the Rane's chair, as the latter was engaged holding a conference with Bukshish Alle, the native doctor, Fyzalli Ressaldar, and several others of her followers; they were consulting what was now best to be done. The Rane was speaking and saying, "Is this the vaunted courage and ability you so lately boasted of so freely—to be beaten in one day by these Faringee Kaffirs! do you call yourselves men, for I don't? Why are you all silent; have you anything to say; speak Ressaldar, if you have speech left in you or any proposal to make?"

Fyzalli looked terribly crestfallen and depressed. He now felt he had made a mistake when it was too late to retrieve it, but being called on, he rose up and said, "Rane Sahiba, God is great and rules all things. We fought hard and well for you, but destiny has given these Faringees the victory; it is fate. But had you taken my advice when you heard the noise of battle going on between our friends, (who came to raise the siege and help us), and the Faringees, you would have burst out and forced the weak line of posts surrounding us and rendered help to our friends by attacking the enemy in their rear. You know I proposed this, and offered to lead, but you preferred the advice of that sneaking Brahmin, Hanildar Laltabade, who told you he had information that the English were not really attacking, but had made a pretence of doing so, and had discharged their guns and muskets at nothing, so as to induce us to come out of our fortifications, believing our friends had arrived to relieve us. Laltabade knows best where he got this information from. Let him speak, his cowardly advice lost us a golden opportunity. What can he urge in his defence?"

Laltabade thus called on, replied in an apologetic, whining, hang-dog tone of voice, "It's all very well for the Ressaldar to put the blame on me now that we know the truth, but though he speaks in so boastful a tone, I really do not remember that he was so very anxious, at the time, to do what he says he so strongly advised. It is easy enough to be wise after an event. We now all know that our friends did come to our relief, but I was not the only person who at the time thought it was better not to sally out, and I cannot see what good it can do abusing and trying to put the blame on me. We have now been two days shut up in this fort. We are not strong enough to force our way out, and we must just remain where we are, for I am convinced that the English will make no terms with us after what has happened. Who would have thought that they were to get the upper hand again when we were told that they had all been swept into the sea, and that the old Rajh, that of the King of Delhi, had been restored."

While Laltabade was speaking, "Alli Murad" the Durban came in quickly, in a somewhat excited state, and said, "If I may be permitted to speak, I think I can give such information as will save us, or at least some of us, after all." The Rane told him to do so, and explain himself. He then said :—

"I have just come down from the watch tower where I was posted, and I observed that from some cause or other the picket of cavalry which watched the Bandare Gate in the city walls has not been replaced, and as it is now late in the afternoon I think it is improbable it will be so, at least until to-morrow morning, when these reliefs are always made by the Faringees. I also perceive that streets leading from the fort to that gate have been left unguarded, and it strikes me that a party might easily during the night pass out of the city and get away into the country without being discovered. Our first object is to save you, dear lady, our chief, and I think that if just before daylight you and a small

mounted escort were to leave the fort and pass quickly through the city and out at the Bandare Gate you might escape these blood-thirsty unbelievers. I know the different turnings of the streets through which you will have to pass, and I will undertake to conduct you safely. If we succeed the others might follow the next day."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE reader must not imagine Alli Murad was as unselfish as his speech would lead one to believe. He thought first of himself, knowing that his services would be required as a guide, and he saw clearly that this opened a way for escape. At the same time he was to a certain extent loyal to his mistress, and anxious to serve her, but his own safety was his first object.

On hearing what he had stated the Rane turned to Gunga and said, "Gunga, you have, I know, about the sharpest eyes among us. Will you accompany Alli Murad back to the watch tower and see if what he tells us is really the case, for if it is, I think the best thing I can do, now that I have found out what stuff my followers are made of, is to leave Ranepore and if possible join my friends in Gwalior."

Gunga at once obeyed her mistress's orders, and the assembly awaited her return in silence. She was not long absent, and when she came back she confirmed what Alli Murad had said.

The Rane then informed her followers that she should select six to accompany her on the morrow before daylight, that they were all to be well mounted and under the command of Fyzalli, and conducted by Alli Murad. She said, "I will take the child Burjore my adopted heir, before me on my horse. If we can get through without being detected you can all follow the next morning, but as most of you will be on foot you will have to start earlier, as it will be very

desirable you should put some miles between you and Ranepore before day breaks; for if you are seen by the Faringee Cavalry you will be cut up to a man. You can rejoin me in Gwalior." The assembly then dispersed.

What had been observed by Alli Murad and Gunga was, curious to say, perfectly true. From some unaccountable mistake or misunderstanding the picket outside the gate of the city called the Bandare Durwaza, had been withdrawn without any relief being sent, and the streets, through rather a circuitous route, from the fort to that gate were left unguarded, probably from a belief that the rebels would never attempt to pass out, while the city was surrounded by British troops, or possibly because the streets through which the rebels intended passing were not known to lead to the city walls.

At about 4 a.m. a party of six horsemen with two women and a child, well mounted and armed, assembled in the courtyard of the fort. First the inner gate and then the outer were cautiously opened to admit of the exit of this little band, who were guided and led by Alli Murad, who was well acquainted with all the turnings and twistings of the narrow crooked streets which led to the city walls, and were unguarded by the English. It passed on quickly and without noise, (for cloth had been bound round the feet of the horses to prevent the sound of the hoofs being heard), and arrived at, and passed through the Bandare Gate into the open country without being discovered or molested in any way.

Just as they had effected their escape day dawned, and, as it happened, a young officer, of the name of Dobson, in command of a patrol of Native Irregular Cavalry, came by. He heard in the distance the clatter of horses feet, and at once suspecting something wrong, rode to the top of a piece of rising ground near, and began looking about him. All he saw, however, about two miles off, was a cloud of dust, which appeared moving away from Ranepore at a very rapid pace.

Dobson at once decided to follow it, and sending two of his men to give information to the nearest picket, he put him-

self at the head of the remainder, ten in number, and went off at a hard gallop after the cloud of dust, which, though he increased his pace and rode fast and well, appeared to keep just about the same distance in front of him.

He was mounted on a very fast high-bred Arab horse, much superior to the horses of his men, and after having ridden about ten miles, without visibly decreasing his distance to the mysterious receding cloud of dust, he said, addressing his followers, "Come on as fast as you can; I will push forward and see if I cannot overtake the party in front." So he put his horse on his metal, and soon found he was closing fast on the pursued.

A quarter of an hour more brought him within a few hundred yards, and he then realised the fact that he had acted somewhat imprudently, and that the Rane (for whose capture all in camp were so desirous) guarded by a formidable escort of six men, was making her escape, and that he alone was incapable of preventing it.

He looked anxiously round for his troopers and saw that they were coming up, but as yet a long way off in his rear. On looking in front he saw six armed mounted men and two women. He was hesitating as to whether he should go on or wait for assistance, when the party of rebels decided the matter for him, by the men halting and then turning round, and, led by Fyzalli, coming straight at him. The two women and the child continued their flight.

The six mounted men came down on the single English gentleman, and he felt that he was quite at their mercy. The odds were great, but there was nothing to be done but to defend himself as best he could, so when they were about twenty paces off he fired his revolver among them, dropping one dead and wounding another, still there were four to one against him, but the result of his fire encouraged him, and replacing his pistol in his belt, he drew his sword and prepared to defend himself, hoping to be able to do so until aid arrived, which now was not very far off. And well did his sword

keep his body that day, as the notches in it on being examined by his friends the next morning proved, but what could one man do against four desperate ruffians, intent on either killing him or sacrificing their own lives in the attempt. He was wounded and cut in many places, and was at last unseated from his horse by a swinging sword cut in the side, delivered from behind, which but for his having returned his revolver into its case (into which it cut deeply) must have been his death blow. He fell, but on his back, still attempting to defend himself with his sword, which he had retained hold of in his fall. Fyzalli dismounted, and standing over him was just in the act of dispatching him with a blow from his heavy two-handed sword, when a loud shout behind attracted his attention, and he turned to look what had caused it. This pause saved Dobson's life, for the next moment the first of his men came up—it was he who had shouted—and passed his lance through the body of the Ressaldar, carrying him for some yards along with him by the impulse and speed with which he was riding to save his officer's life. A shot from the carbine of the next man up disposed of Alli Murad.

There were two of the rebels left, but the remainder of Dobson's escort had now arrived, and they were soon cut down, neither asking for or receiving quarter.

After a halt of a few minutes a charpoy was procured from a neighbouring village, and a litter was formed of it, and the party returned carrying their wounded officer on it to Ranepore.

Dire was the wrath of General Hugh Ross when he was informed that Rane Luchmie Bhie had been permitted to escape, and various and many were the reports and rumours, that courts of inquiry, to be followed by courts martial were to assemble to investigate as to whose carelessness had permitted the escape of the Rane, but eventually the good nature of the General prevailed, and he contented himself with a tremendous wigging in orders all round to the offending parties concerned, but he let the matter drop with the

remark, that in times such as these were, where so much zeal, courage, and ability had been displayed by all under his command, he would forbear to take any further serious notice of the delinquency and breach of discipline so much to be regretted.

The party in the Fort witnessed the escape of the Rane and her escort, but were unaware of what had happened to them afterwards. They then began to think of themselves. One of them had discovered the entrance to the passage leading from the Fort into the vaulted room under the Rane's palace, and a working party had been employed removing the obstructions placed in it (as the reader may remember) by Colonel McLeod's orders. On doing so, it became apparent that a way of escape was open to them, at least as far as the "Bowlie," the door to which opened outside the city walls, but then the difficulty arose how to evade the British troops on the watch outside the city and surrounding it.

At a consultation held on this point, however, "Bukshish Alle," who was now the leader and chief authority in the Fort, said :—"At all events it would be better to take our chance and try and force our way out through the pickets, to being shut up and shelled day and night here, and eventually, even if we do manage to hold out, being starved to death."

So It was decided to make the attempt during the night. There were still in the Fort about two thousand men, most of them Sepahees. They were armed with muskets and bayonets, and had no lack of ammunition. They were also desperate men, and they knew that as the murderers of their officers they could expect no mercy.

Bukshish Alle and Laltabade were their chosen leaders, and they decided that towards morning they should all assemble in the vaulted chamber, and the rooms connected with the Bowlie, and at a given time pass out in a body and force the picket opposite them, and make off as fast as possible afterwards towards Gwalior.

There was some difficulty about the rooms in the Bowlie

holding so many, but it was thought if they closed well up and occupied the vaulted room and passages leading from it this difficulty would be overcome.

So about two in the morning they began to pass down the steps of the passage, and soon filled the Bowlie and rooms connected with it. When all had left the Fort and stood ready to go out, the word was given in a whisper from mouth to mouth, and in silence the leading files advanced into the darkness of the night.

The sentry of the British picket challenged, but receiving no answer fired into the advancing mass, and fell back.

The officer in charge of this post, was a Major Sharp, an old and experienced soldier, who on making use of his night glass saw that he was threatened by a large and formidable body of the rebels, and he at once formed his plans, which were to let them pass without opposition, as he felt confident that if not checked they would be at the mercy of the British in the open country to which they were moving, but if attacked they might retire to where they had come from, (where that was, or how they had come out of the city puzzled him), but having decided what was best he at once gave orders to his men to fall back to one flank and not to interfere with the enemy, which he could see advancing by the assistance of his binocular and the light of the stars which were shining, though dimly.

He directed a body of cavalry under his orders to follow the rebels, and at intervals to drop men on the route to point out the direction they took, and he himself rode to the quarters of the General, and told him what had happened and what he had done, and recommended that a strong force of cavalry and artillery should start at once and follow the retreating rebels so as to attack them when daylight broke, which it would in about two hours or so.

The General saw how judiciously Major Sharp had acted in avoiding the confusion of a night attack in order that the rebels might be more effectually dealt with in the

open, and by daylight. He commended him for his intelligence and promptitude of action, and immediately sent off orders for a force of all arms to start in pursuit, but not to attack until daylight.

The rebels felt some surprise at being permitted to pass without molestation. They knew from the sentry having fired at them that they had been discovered, but they thought that perhaps the picket opposite to where they had come out (which they had observed from the Fort before leaving it, was not a very strong one) might have considered "discretion the better part of valor" on seeing so large a body advancing towards it, and consequently retired without attacking.

They marched on in silence for about two hours, and began now to think themselves pretty safe, in so much so that their leader ordered a halt near a small stream of water, and one and all began thankfully to slack their thirst and congratulate each other on their escape.

While doing so, there came carried on the wind from the direction they had come to them the sound of wheels and then the distant neighing of horses. The first might possibly be caused by carts, and the neighing of horses by travellers passing in the irrear. It was, however, thought advisable to resume their retreat, and this they did.

When day dawned they found themselves in the vicinity of a lofty isolated rocky hill, in parts covered with jungle and boulders of stone, and as it became lighter, on looking back they saw a cloud of dust about a mile or two in their rear, slowly advancing towards them, and they then realised the fact that they had only been permitted to leave the protection of the Fort to be the more easily and effectually dealt with and destroyed in the open plain.

Laltabade, having formed up the rebels in order, stepped forward and addressed them as follows:—

"Brothers, it is very evident that the Kaffirs still thirst for our blood, and have been following us all the way. We are about two thousand strong, but we are only infantry, and

our enemies have as you see cavalry and artillery as well as a body of European infantry mounted on camels. They will very soon be up with us, and in the 'Maidūn' we shall have but a poor chance, but the hill which we have been so fortunate as to reach will afford us cover and protection, and we may be able to hold it until night, and mayperhaps then get an opportunity of escaping. At any rate it is our only chance, so disperse in small bodies all over it, take up commanding positions on it behind boulders of rock and brushwood, keep well under cover, don't throw away your ammunition, and let every shot tell. Now may 'Bhagwan' help us, for we do indeed require his aid." This plan being the only one that would under the circumstances give them a respite from death, Laltabade's advice was followed, and the rebel Sepahees ascended and spread over the hill, so opportunely near them, but which, from what shortly after happened, was given the significant name of "Slaughter Hill," and well did it deserve this designation.

On the close approach of the British force "Slaughter Hill" was surrounded by cavalry and infantry, so as to prevent the possibility of escape, and the guns then opened on it from three different points at once with a heavy and searching fire of shells and shrapnell. The result may easily be conceived. In about an hour there were hardly a hundred men of the two thousand who had ascended it left living, and most of these were wounded and dying.

The artillery fire was then ordered to cease, and strong bodies of infantry, both European and native, were sent up to finish the work of destruction.

In the Indian Mutiny of 1857-58, quarter was seldom asked for and as seldom given, and never to the murderers of helpless women and children, as was the case in the present instance.

So the bones of two thousand such, from which in the course of time the flesh was torn and picked by the wild animals of the jungles, and bleached and shrivelled by the sun and rain, whitened the sides of "Slaughter Hill," a fitting monument

of just vengeance taken by British soldiers for the deed of soul-stirring horror and cowardly assasination, done a year before in the blood-stained city near which it stood.

CHAPTER XXX.

WHEN the Rane saw her escort face round, and attack Dobson, she pressed forward, thinking that her followers would soon dispose of him, and would quickly rejoin her.

After having ridden several miles she slackened her pace, and looked back, but saw nothing of her escort.

She observed to Gunga, "Perhaps the Sahib was not alone, his men might have been following closely behind him, and our guard may have been overcome. I see the remains of the 'salt hedge,' it has been burnt, but I know it leads to Agra, and that Gwalior is in that direction also. For the present it must be our guide, and we must ride as fast as we can, for it is quite possible we may be followed"—and on they went, until they had put good thirty miles between them and Ranepore.

The resolution formed by the Rane to proceed to Gwalior direct was not however, followed up, for she and her companion Gunga had not gone many miles further, when they saw a troop of cavalry moving slowly in the same direction as themselves, and surmising that it must belong to their own party, the rebels, from there being no European Officers with it, and from its generally disordered appearance, the Rane pressed on and soon overtook it. To Luchme Bhie's no small surprise she recognised in its Commander an old friend and ally, no less a person than the famous leader of the 'Nana's' forces, 'Tantia Topee.'

Perhaps the reader may remember his having been the bearer of a letter and message from his master to the Rane, which he delivered on being received by her at Ranepore on the forenoon of the day she held a Conference with Colonel McLeod and the other officials, both military and civil of Ranepore, when she assured them of her fidelity and good feeling towards them and the British Government, in confirmation of which she shortly afterwards attempted to poison them all at an entertainment to which she had invited them.

Tantia expressed pleasure at seeing Luchmie Bhie, and at her escape, saying "Dear Lady, I am truly delighted to meet you, but I find it difficult to account for your presence here, alone and unattended save by one female servant. How did you effect your escape from the hands of those bloodthirsty English?"

"My friend Tantia," the Rane replied, "I have only you and your master to thank for having been put in a position requiring escape, and for my present helpless and forlorn condition. Did you not promise you would advance in force and raise the siege of Ranepore in which we were surrounded, and what—I ask—have you done towards keeping your word? It is true—at least so report says—that you did come, yes, and in such numbers too, that had you had but as much as one 'Rutte' weight of manhood among you—being twenty to one in number—you would have had no difficulty whatever in fulfilling your pledge to me. But your hearts, like that of the timid hare, turned to water; and your courage entirely failed you on seeing the faces of the white men, and you fled like a pack of jackals yelping and howling, and doing everything but what you were bound to do, and that was to fight bravely for your country and religion, and crush the small body of unbelieving dogs opposed to you."

Tantia did not appear to relish these taunts and accusation of cowardice so lavishly bestowed on him and his followers by the fearless woman addressing him, but he replied in good temper, "Don't make things worse than they

are, Bhie Sahiba. We did our best and failed—but I should like to know why the garrison of Ranepore did not break out when we were engaging the English, and attack them in the rear as had been agreed upon. Had you, in Ranepore, done this, it is highly probable that instead of being defeated, we should now have been celebrating a victory."

"Because," replied the Rane, "that sneaking Brahmin Havildar Laltabade opposed our doing so, until too late, saying that no real attack had been made, and that the English—by their firing—were simply trying to get us to come out."

Tantia replied "There is a very old and true saying 'that the mouse that has but one hole is easily caught,' but thanks to God, we are not in that plight. It is true we have been defeated in several instances, but have we not nearly the whole of Hindostan still at our backs—Sindia only holds aloof until the proper time. His troops would at once join us if they had an opportunity, and mark me, Rane Sahiba, before long we will give them that opportunity—at present we are on our way to the 'Jumna' where we intend making a determined stand against the British at Kalpe, but if beaten there we shall retire on Gwalior, where Sindia's troops and probably Sindia himself, will join the good cause. You shall throw in your lot with us and call on your scattered followers to join you on the river Jumna, where God willing, we shall next do battle with the Faringees."

The Rane saw she had little or no choice, and agreed to accompany Tantia to Kalpe on the Jumna—which she did, and was there united with the remnant of her retainers and followers still surviving.

What happened then is a matter of history. How, after hard fighting — in which the heat and sun proved more formidable to the British than the rebel forces—the latter were forced back on Gwalior. How on arriving there the rebels were joined by Sindia's ill disposed and mutinous army. How Sindia himself—loyal to the British cause—fled for

protection to Agra, and how he was again restored to his throne and authority by the advance of a British force, and the defeat of his own followers combined with the rebel army on the plains of Gwalior, within view of his own Capital.

The decisive battle had just been fought, the sun had set and the silvery light of the moon shone with a weird light out over the blood stained field of battle, so late the scene of strife and death to so many. The forms of the yet unburied dead—black and white—lay side by side as they had fallen —for though the wounded had been carefully searched for and removed, the burial of the dead had been postponed by the tired out soldiers until the next day.

Fortune had, as usual, declared for England, and in that part of India, at least, the campaign was over.

About a mile removed from the battle field, there lay by the side of a small grassy stream of water emerging slowly from underneath the protruding corner of a rock, a woman, though wearing the dress of a man; there could now be no mistaking her sex, for the turban which had covered her head was displaced, and the long black hair (in the possession of which all women of Hindostan pride themselves so much, and the removal of which would be deemed so dire a disgrace) hung dishevelled and uncared for about her neck and shoulders.

The upper part of her dress had been torn open and displayed her bosom, in the left side of which the fatal bullet which had given her her death wound, had entered, just a little too high up to have struck the heart. The flow of blood from the wound she had endeavoured to staunch—though ineffectually—with a handkerchief. She did not now appear to be bleeding much outwardly but the contortions of her face, and the fixed look of agony depicted in it clearly showed the pain she was suffering. Now and again she endeavoured to slake her thirst by steeping a piece of cloth—torn from her under garment—in the water of the

stream, and applying it to her mouth. Near her grazed her horse, apparently loth to leave its mistress, and unable to comprehend why it was left uncared for.

This woman—as probably the reader has surmised—was Luchme Bhie, the Rane of Ranepore.

As she lay in agony she muttered to herself: "Of all my followers, of all those I have paid so lavishly, and treated so kindly is there not one left to hand me a cup of cold water to quench my burning thirst, or ease my pain by their sympathy?"

To this question of the dying woman a most unwelcome and unexpected reply was given.

As she lay as described tossing about from side to side, there approached, stealing towards her, with the stealthy tread of the panther, a man, a native of Hindostan, stout and apparently well nourished, but dark in colour from exposure to weather, and of evil and forbidding aspect. He had been attracted to the spot by seeing the horse of the Rane, already mentioned, and came forward with the intention of securing it for himself.

He was on his way to the field of battle with the vile object of enriching himself by plundering the dead, and just as he came near the spot where Luchme Bhie lay, she had given utterance though in a low voice to the wail of reproach we have recorded above with regard to the neglect of her servants and followers.

The man we have just mentioned on hearing her paused and stood still to listen, and then, as he glanced down on the speaker, a feeling of devilish joy took possession of him, and stepping up close to the prostrate form of the woman, and bending over her, his eyes glaring with malignant rage and triumph, he said in a voice husky with suppressed anger:—"Yes, she devil, there is one, look at him well, and say what deed of mercy, grace, or kindness you deserve and expect at his hands?"

Luchme Bhie, thus addressed, looked up, and saw bending

over her, her worst enemy, and the one she hated perhaps the most on earth, the fugitive assassin, Bolanath Teware.

To account for this most unexpected meeting it is requisite that the reader should learn what the circumstances were that led to it. On the morning of the day to which the incidents just narrated belong the Rane at the head of a strong body of Irregular Cavalry, had selected for herself a front place in the battle just about to commence. As before stated she wore male apparel, and sat her horse like a man. During the battle she had again and again led her men into the thickest of the strife and escaped unharmed, until at last, disheartened and reduced to less than a third of their number,—they refused any longer to follow her. Until now she had escaped unhurt, either by bullet, lance, or sword, though she had courted death in every way possible. Her last charge had been made, and her men were retiring in disorder, and she found it impossible to rally them, but having succeeded in getting ten or twelve to face the enemy, while trying to get them to advance, a stray bullet struck her in the breast, and she reeled in her saddle, and at last, half bewildered and faint, turned her horse's head and fled.

Before long, being pursued by some European cavalry, her small party separated and spread over the country, each man seeking his own individual safety in flight.

The Rane as it were mechanically retained her seat on her horse, and was carried by it to where we have described her lying, and where from sheer exhaustion she had fallen, fortunately near the stream of water referred to above, from which she to some extent relieved the burning thirst caused by her wound, and where Bolanath had so unexpectedly found her.

To account for his presence there, it will be necessary to give a sketch of what had happened to him after his escape from the Jogee's Cave and his assassination of poor Elsie.

He had made his way to Cawnpore, but finding nothing to suit him there he sought the British force advancing to

Gwalior, and offered to act as a spy, and obtain and give information of what was going on in the rebel camp. His services having been accepted he then entered Gwalior, intending also to offer himself in a like capacity to the rebel army, but on finding that the Rane was there and in power he was obliged to give up this last promising programme of being a spy on both sides, and he returned to the British force with such information as he was able to gather regarding the strength of the rebels, intending not to return, at any rate for the present, to Gwalior.

He was on his way to the field of battle to see what he could pick up from the wounded or dead, and so add something to his ill-gotten gains, when, as the reader knows, he came so unexpectedly in contact with his late mistress.

When Luchme Bhie had realised the fact that it was really Bolanath, her old retainer and servant, who addressed her, her first feeling was that of surprise, for among the stirring events she had taken so active a part in, she had almost forgotten him, but even in her weak and dying state this feeling was soon superseded by one of bitter detestation, and a longing for revenge.

Collecting herself as best she could she returned his look of angry hatred with one of defiance, and said :—

"Bolanath! my enemy, have you also come to triumph over me? I defy you, lying wounded and dying as you see me, I spit on you (here she suited her action to her words). You can take my life; do so, I pray, for I little value it now. My last words on earth will be to call down curses on your vile, deceitful, cowardly head."

On hearing this Bolanath smiled, by no means a pleasant smile, and again addressing himself to the wounded woman, said :—"And did you indeed think me so poor a master of the art of revenge, after all your teaching, as to believe that I would put you, my amiable mistress and friend, out of the agony and pain I gloat over, and delight in witnessing and seeing you suffer? No, Luchme Bhie, you have quite

mistaken the ability of your humble follower. You shall die a lingering painful death, without even a drop of the water you so much desire flowing so near you to cool your burning lips. You who have been so unmerciful to others cannot surely object to experience what you have caused them to suffer. Time about is but fair play, you know." With that he snatched away the wet cloth with which she had been moistening her lips from her feeble hand, and pulled her roughly several paces further away from the stream of water.

Luchme Bhie's hand sought something hid in the folds of her dress, and quick as thought she drew forth a small, sharp pointed dagger, and before Bolanath, who was still stooping over her, perceived her intention, she struck with all her remaining strength at his heart, but so weak and unsteadily was the blow delivered that the point of the dagger only just entered Bolanath's flesh, and merely inflicted a very slight wound.

He at once seized her hand and wrenched the dagger from it, saying, "The day was, you 'Shitām,' when your blow would have had a very different result. You won't make me angry or cause me to put you out of your pain. No, no; Bolanath has a treat before him yet in witnessing the agony and suffering of his dear, respected, loving mistress!"

The Rane heard him with a sinister smile, and after a few minutes said:—"Bolanath, the wound I have given you is but a scratch that a child would not care for, and you are a strong, healthy man, and have, I have no doubt, the hopes of long life and many years of enjoyment before you, have you not?"

Bolanath replied:—"Had your strength been equal to your will, I should now probably be as near death as you are; but, you vixen, I was too quick for you."

"I am not so sure of that, Bolanath," retorted the dying woman, again indulging in one of her ghastly smiles.

Bolanath thought he discovered some hidden meaning in her words, and knowing who he had to deal with, felt some-

what uncomfortable, and the Rane continued after a pause :—" Yes, Bolanath, the wound is slight, a mere scratch, a simple nothing, but you forget, my friend, that the dagger point was poisoned! I only waited to let the poison circulate in your veins before I reminded you!"

The Rane had hardly ceased speaking when a deadly feeling of sickness came over Bolanath and a sharp shooting pain ran as it were through his body like a red hot iron—and he then became aware that even in her last moments his enemy had been too much for him, and that he had let himself be duped by his cunning mistress, and that death was near him also. " Ah," added the Rane, " I see the poison has already begun to do its work, and you will not be long behind Luchme Bhie in entering the land of shadows, if indeed you do not precede her.'

" Farewell friend, I wish you a happy meeting on the other side."

" That shall never be, incarnate Devil," shrieked Bolanath, as he gave way to his irresistible rage and anger, and with these words he buried the dagger—which he still held in his hand —deep in the Rane's throat, adding blow after blow, until he felt a faint clammy perspiration and a sense of suffocation steal over him. The exertion had assisted and hastened the working of the poison (which had been taken from the fangs of the deadly cobra) and Bolanath, the spy, the traitor, the murderer of poor Elsie, fell back and breathed his last in agony, lying side by side with his implacable and vindictive mistress—who even in her dying moments knew how to revenge herself.

We leave to the reader to imagine what their meeting was in the next world—if indeed they were allowed to meet there — but it is most earnestly to be hoped that they were not, at any rate, until they were both in a far different frame of mind to that in which their erring spirits left their earthly frames.

But even for such as Luchme Bhie and Bolanath we believe there is hope, nay more, we do not hesitate to assert

with confidence, that in God's good time, when prompted, taught, and encouraged by the loving and pure angels and spirits deputed by the great Father of all as their instructors, they renounce and repent of the evil deeds done by them in earth life, they, and such as they, will, step by step advance and take their places in those spheres of progress and light to which all aspire to rise.

In the cool of the morning two figures on horseback were to be seen advancing slowly towards the spot where the dead bodies of the Rane and Bolanath Teware lay. They were those of a woman and an old grey-haired man, and they were followed at some distance by several men on foot.

The woman was our old acquaintance Gunga, and her companion Balmukind Shastri, who the reader may remember had offered such unpalatable advice to the Rane as to have caused her to order his assassination. On nearing the spot, the Rane's horse—still grazing near—attracted their attention, and Gunga said, "Shastri Sahib, my mistress must be near, for I recognise her horse, let us search for her." They dismounted, and were not long in discovering her. She lay on her back, her features were stiff and rigid in death, but they still bore an expression of suffering mixed with that of defiance and triumph.

Gunga looked long and earnestly at her, and muttered to herself:

"And is this the end of all your ambition and pride. I cannot tell why I have taken the trouble to seek you out, but there was always a sort of magnetic attraction working—against my will—which caused me to follow your fortunes. I have never been able to account for this."

"But who have we here," she added, looking at Bolanath, who was lying on his face (a position his last agony of internal pain had caused him to take). She turned it up and in surprise exclaimed: "Bolanath! and have you two (more deadly enemies there did not exist on earth) met at last and shared death together?

"This is wonderful, indeed, what do you think of it, Shastri Sahib?"

Balmukind who had been examining the Rane's body, had observed various dagger wounds on it, and also saw the weapon with which they had evidently been inflicted, lying close to Bolanath formed his opinion accordingly, and replied to Gunga's question: "There is little doubt but that Bolanath killed his mistress with her own dagger. Look, Gunga, you must recognise it. I do, but what can have killed Bolanath? I see nothing but a slight wound an inch or so deep, just over the heart, with a drop or two of blood trickling from it, that surely could never have done so?"

After some consideration, Gunga replied, "I have it; the Rane always carried her dagger with the point of it dipped in poison, and she must have wounded Bolanath before he attacked her. God is just—they both deserved to die. But, Shastri Sahib, we must not forget she was our mistress, the Rane of Ranepore, and that we have eaten her salt for years. It is incumbent on us to perform her funeral rites, and to convey her ashes and deposit them in the holy river Ganges."

"True," replied Balmukind, "however bad and sinful she may have been I cannot but remember she was the wife of my lamented master Gungadhur Row—the good."

So they called the men who were following them, and removed both bodies to a neighbouring village, where, having formed funeral piles of dry wood, they placed the corpse of Bolanath on one, and of Rane Luchme Bhie on the other, and, having applied fire, waited patiently until they were consumed. Then they gathered the white ashes from that of Luchme Bhie and deposited them in a brass Lota or cup, and having sealed it up, one month afterwards, Balmukind with his own hands threw it into the river Ganges, to which the old man had travelled for this purpose, with Gunga, and thus they paid this last tribute of respect to the memory of their mistress.

CHAPTER XXXI.

SIX months had passed since the taking of Ranepore and the installation of Gordon in the office formerly held by his lamented friend, Colonel McLeod, that of Commissioner of the Ranepore Division.

District officers had been appointed, and had taken up their work of organisation, and though some few bands of rebels (remnants of the late mutinous Sepahees) still frequented the remote and jungly parts of the country, great progress had been made in the work of restoring order, to which the Gonde levy, raised under Gordon's orders, by old Unto and his sons, was greatly conducive, so, by degrees, things, from a state of chaos and turbulence, were fast settling down into one of calmness, tranquility, and rest.

Gordon had visited the most remote parts of his division, and in person proclaimed an amnesty and pardon to all not deeply implicated in murder, and who had not been leaders in the rebellion, and at last confidence in the stability and generosity of the British Government began to be felt.

He had, as the reader may imagine, earnestly searched for some traces of the murderer of Elsie, but without success, and indeed he could not even ascertain what had become of her dead body, for the village in which she had been assassinated had been burnt during some caste quarrels of its inhabitants with a neighbouring one, and it was now deserted.

Nothing had been heard of Gunga, either, whom Gordon had been most anxious to find and reward for her faithful services. She was known to have followed the fortunes of her mistress, the Rane, but after her death nothing could be discovered regarding her. Old Unto had been appointed to

be Gordon's Orderly Jemidar, and his village of Gonde Gowla, with a large addition to it of adjoining land, was bestowed on him and his heirs rent free. His two sons were similarly rewarded, and now held the positions of Orderly Choprasses to Gordon, under their father, and were in constant attendance on him.

Little Budrõo became Gordon's personal attendant or valet, and old Doria held the office of cook, so the reader will perceive that he had a faithful and tried surrounding. They had all received sums of money as rewards, which rendered them independent for life, but they preferred serving their master (whom they loved sincerely) to leading a life of idleness.

Gordon was in constant correspondence with his wife Kate, who, on landing in England, went to live with her mother, who resided in a house in London, but her last letter informed Gordon that some of his relations had invited her to visit them in Scotland, and that before long she should have the pleasure of seeing the place of her dear husband's birth. This pleasure was all the greater, as before long the estate of Abermore, which belonged to her husband, would be freed from its liabilities and debts, and again come into the possession of its owner, and she, as his wife, would be its mistress.

Gordon had just returned to Ranepore, and was encamped in a tope of mango trees, about a mile from the city. He had been replying to his wife's letter, and had said that now matters were in a satisfactory state, he was seriously thinking of applying for leave to proceed home and join Kate in England, a pleasure he eagerly looked forward to, and desired most earnestly.

He had written a long, affectionate letter, and it lay open on his writing table. It was about seven o'clock in the evening in the month of November, when the days are short, and the light failing him he thought he would postpone finishing his letter, and closing it up until after his dinner,

which would take place at half-past eight, or perhaps until the next morning, for that would be time enough to catch the mail for England.

Being rather fatigued from a long and heavy day's office work, he lay down on a couch to rest himself, and very soon was overcome by sleep.

He had not slept long when he began to dream, and that most vividly too, of the stirring scenes through which he had passed during the last six or eight months. His dream appeared to mix him up with Elsie and Kate in a most extraordinary and confusing way. First the one and then the other appeared to approach him, and beckon to him to follow, while he felt that he was fixed to the ground and could not move hand or foot (this, as the reader may perhaps be aware, is not an uncommon symptom of nightmare), and though asleep he appeared to realise the fact that he was sleeping, and suffering from an unpleasant dream, for he tried to awake himself, and at last succeeded in doing so, with a start.

While he had slept the moon had risen, and was shining brightly into the tent through the open door.

On Gordon opening his eyes it seemed to him that the unpleasant dream he had just succeeded in shaking off was about to be verified in real earnest, for on raising himself up, he cast a glance towards his writing table, and there he saw a figure the identity of which he could in no way be mistaken in. It was that of Elsie, his dead wife!

She was standing over the letter he had written and left open on his writing table, intended for his living wife. On it and on the figure of Elsie the moon shone bright and clear. Her face was turned from him, and was bent down towards the letter, but the familiar and well remembered form, he felt confident was no other than that of his lost and murdered wife.

While he gazed, she slowly turned her face towards him, and then all doubt (if there had been any) vanished, as he recognised Elsie's well known look and expression.

Her face was weird, wan, and of sickly aspect, and she seemed to look fixedly and sorrowfully at him, without however moving or speaking.

This sudden apparition, as Gordon believed it to be, was more than he could bear, following, as it did, the excitement of his troubled dream, and as he looked, a mist came over his sight, followed by total darkness—a loud ringing, drumming noise commenced in his ears, and he fell back for the time insensible and unconscious of everything.

How long he remained in this state he did not know, but on again regaining consciousness, and looking towards the spot where Elsie or her wraith had stood, there was nothing to be seen, though the letter lay as before, open on the table, with the moonbeams playing over and distinctly showing it to view.

Gordon pulled himself together, rubbed his eyes, got up and walked to the table, took up the letter, put it down again, and then said to himself, "It must have been a continuation of my nightmare, and now I come to think of it, that delicious curry of tinned lobster which I partook of so freely, and which that old artist Doria sent up for my tiffin, followed by a bottle of stout and half-a-dozen graft mangoes, was not the thing to go to sleep on, or to improve one's digestion, and I am inclined to think this had a good deal to say to my vision, and yet, what I saw was very real, and I still have the remains of the dreadful ringing in my ears, and the horrid feeling of faintness. If it is true? but I dare not contemplate that, or think of Kate's situation, in such a case—It was well that we were wedded and parted.—Surely, after escaping so many dangers and misfortunes, I cannot be reserved for such a fate as this? a hundred times worse than death—God help me, for I sorely need it." Such were Gordon's thoughts as he paced hurriedly up and down his tent

As time passed on, dinner was announced, but he had no inclination to eat, and for the first time in his life he felt that he was going to be very ill. His head ached incessantly, and

his ideas became confused.

At last he was obliged to call in the Doctor, who at once ordered him to lay up, and pronounced his symptoms to be those of brain fever.

Gordon had erected a small two roomed Bungalow, just outside the city of Ranepore, built of mud and thatched over with grass, in one room of which as a temporary measure he had established his office—and to this he betook himself, and before long he became quite delirious and very nigh unto death.

At the end of three weeks during which time he hovered between it and life a decidedly favourable change took place, and he showed symptoms of recovery. His medical adviser now gave it, as his opinion, that a change to a cold climate was necessary, and offered to send him home on sick leave for a year and to this he gladly agreed. And when well enough to do so, he wrote to Kate, telling her that before long he would start for England, and make her heart glad by his presence.

Slowly and by degrees he got better, and stronger, but he could never get the vision of Elsie out of his mind. It continually haunted him and impeded his restoration to health. He dwelt upon it in a way that surprised himself, day and night.

About a fortnight before the period he had fixed for his departure from Ranepore for England, one evening he was sitting alone in the verandah of his Bungalow, his mind still dwelling on the old subject, and feeling weak, ill, and depressed. He had been trying to divert his thoughts by reading, and his eyes were fixed vacantly on the pages of his book when he heard a light footstep near him, and on looking up (much to his surprise and gratification) he saw Gunga standing by his side. Rising to greet her, he said, Gunga, I am indeed pleased to see you again, I had quite given you up, as I could never succeed in hearing anything of you, except that you had accompanied the Rane in her flight.

After her death you disappeared altogether. Where have you been ?"

Gunga replied "Sahib, if you will permit me before going into my own affairs, I must deliver a message to you, from one you least expect to hear of, but one you once loved dearly, and for all I know to the contrary do still."

A faint giddy feeling came over Gordon as he listened, but recovering himself, he said, "Gunga, extraordinary as it may appear to you, I have been expecting this, you come from Elsie, do you not ?"

"Yes, your surmise, Sahib, is right," replied Gunga ; "I do come with a message from your wife, Elsie. She has not many hours to live. She wants to bid you farewell. Can you come? Are you strong enough to do so? I know you have been ill, and I have brought a Palanquin and bearers. They are about a quarter of a mile from here, and I have also brought a native gentleman's dress for you to put on and wear, as I do not wish the bearers to recognise you. Here it is." She produced from a bundle she was carrying, a loose white Hindostani dress and Turban.

Silently Gordon took them from her, and having put them on without a word, followed her out, dressed and disguised as a native. Where Gunga had left the Palanquin they found it, waiting for them. Gordon entered it and was carried to a distant and retired part of the City of Ranepore, where at Gunga's request he alighted, and leaving his conveyance, followed her on foot slowly through several streets and turnings. At last they came to a small native house, and Gunga opening the door signed to Gordon to enter the outer room, and went into the interior herself, to prepare Elsie to receive him.

After a few minutes she returned, and beckoned Gordon to follow her. This he did, trembling at each step, and hardly able to proceed.

On a low charpoy, looking more like the dead than the living, lay poor Elsie. On seeing Gordon, her eyes lit up

for a moment with something of their former brightness (Elsie was famous for her jet-black expressive eyes), and she tried hard to raise herself to receive him, but her strength failed her, and she was unable to do so.

Gordon was so much affected that for a time he was unable to articulate. He however advanced, and kneeling by the side of the bed, took his dying wife (for such she undoubtedly was) in his arms, and affectionately kissed her faded and woe begone lips and cheeks, saying:—"Elsie, this is a sad meeting indeed."

Elsie signed to Gunga to hold a cup, containing a stimulant to her lips, and having drunk a few mouthfuls, said, addressing Gordon:—"The meeting is a sad one, and, dear husband, it is our last on this earth; but I could not die without once again seeing you, and telling you all that has happened to me since we parted, so full of hope for the future. But I must be quick, or my strength will not permit even of my doing this." She then continued:—"After I was cut down and left for dead, in the travellers' rest house at Rāt—as you most probably have heard from my faithful escort, Puggo—I returned to consciousness to find myself lying on the ground, in a small tent, supported by a woman who was fanning my forehead, and moistening my lips with water. Several other women were sitting round us, who appeared to take great interest in my recovery. After a time I found strength to speak, and I asked where I was, and what had happened to me. One of the women replied kindly:—'You are among friends, but keep quiet, and rest until you are stronger, and we will then tell you all.'

"I followed their advice so feelingly given, and it was several days before I was made aware of how I had escaped with life, and how I had come where I was. I was told that my friends—for such they indeed proved themselves to be—had found what they thought a dead body, lying on the floor of the rest house, where they entered with the intention of remaining the night. It appears they were women returning

to Benares, from a pilgrimage to Juggernath. At first, on seeing me lying covered with blood, and apparently dead, they were extremely terrified, and determined to pass on as quickly as they could, but just as they were preparing to do so, one of them observed symptoms of life in me, and returning, placed her hand on my heart, which she felt was still beating. They then consulted together, and, woman-like, decided on befriending me. So they took me up and placed me in their cart, and carried me with them for the whole of the night and the next day; having travelled some twenty miles, they alighted and pitched their small tent near a well by the road side. It was then that I first came to myself, as I have described to you. After a day or two's rest, they again proceeded on their journey, and took me with them to Benares, where, after many weary days' travelling—and indeed they were very weary and trying to me, suffering as I was from unhealed and dangerous wounds—we arrived at our journey's end, I found that my friends were connected with a Temple at Benares, which was situated on the banks of the holy river Ganges. By their advice I hired a room in a house near the Temple. Although the person who had attempted my life, had robbed me of the belt of gold Muhurs I had round my waist, I had one or two valuable rings, and several gold ornaments concealed about me, which fortunately escaped him; and some of these I sold, and supplied myself with what I required, in the way of food and clothing; but I suffered much from anxiety of mind regarding you, and what had happened to you, for I could get no information about you. All I knew was that the garrison of the Fort of Ranepore had been cruelly put to the sword. Time passed on, and my wounds healed; but my strength did not return, and I became subject to violent spasms of the heart, and life appeared a burden. One morning I had, with the assistance of my kind friends, crawled down to the bathing ghāt set aside for women, in front of the Temple, and was sitting in the rays of the morning sun, enjoying the

warmth they gave, and looking at the water, waiting until I gathered strength enough to enter it and bathe, when I saw a female figure I thought I knew approaching the river; as she came nearer I looked at her face, and to my wonder and great joy I recognised Gunga. I watched her take her morning bath and reclothe herself, before I made her aware of my presence; and greatly did she rejoice when she saw me, and fervent, loving, and affectionate were her embraces and congratulations. But she could tell me nothing about you, except that she had heard you were with the force that captured Ranepore; but from the time she fled from it, in company with the Rane, she knew nothing of what had taken place there. I told her how I had left you, and of my reason for doing so; I could not tell her for certain who my assassin was, but I said that just before I became quite insensible, when I was cut down so unexpectedly, I thought I recognised the features of Bolanath, and she informed me that vengeance had overtaken him, and that he had suffered death by the poisoned dagger of his mistress. After a time, we agreed to travel down here together, and did so by short stages, for even then I felt I had not long to live. On arriving, at my request Gunga secured this house for us, as I wanted rest and quiet after my journey, before seeking you out and making my existence known to you. After a week, I made up my mind to go and see you; and one night, that on which you were taken so ill—as I afterwards ascertained through Gunga—I found my way to your tent, and entered it alone and unobserved; on doing so I saw you sleeping on a couch, and I stood over and looked at you for some time. While so engaged, I felt very weak and ill, and sought a seat. There was a chair standing by your writing table, and I made up my mind to sit down on it and await your wakening. As I approached the table, my eye fell on an open letter, beginning 'My Dearest Wife;' and I could not resist the impulse that came over me to read more—for was I not your wife? I did so, and soon saw that it was not intended for me, but for another. I do not blame

you, my dearest husband, for what you have done; you believed me dead, and had every right to marry again. I was thinking of what I should do, when I heard you move in your sleep, and I turned towards you; but your face was in shadow, and from where I stood I could not see whether you were awake or not. An impulse seized me, to fly, and, if possible, hide the fact of my existence from you for ever. I did so, and joined Gunga who was waiting for me outside, some little way off, and we returned here. I then made up my mind, when I became strong enough, to return to Benares, and that you should never be made aware of my existence. But instead of getting stronger I got weaker and weaker, and feeling that my last moments were near, I sent Gunga to you, as you know, to ask you to come and bid me farewell. No one need ever know of this—Gunga is the only living soul who is aware of my being alive, and she is faithful and true, and will never betray you. I have a last request to make, and perhaps—under the circumstances—you may think it an extraordinary one. It is this (here Elsie took from her finger a small diamond ring), that when you again go through the marriage ceremony with Kate, which for form's sake I imagine you will do, you will give her this, with Elsie's love, and tell her I loved you so well that I am glad to die for you; and that she must take my place, and love you as much as I have. We shall meet in another world; until then, my dearest husband, farewell, and think of me as day breaks, for I feel that about that time my spirit will take its flight. And now kiss me for the last time; and may the great Spirit keep you until we meet again."

Gordon was much affected, and did as Elsie requested, for he saw that her strength was failing her, and that she wished to be alone. He, however, said before leaving:—"If God spares you, Elsie, I will see you again to-morrow." She only shook her head and closed her eyes.

Gordon then sorrowfully and sadly took his way back to the place where he had left the Palanquin, and having entered it, regained his bungalow.

He, however, felt no inclination for food, and when his servants announced dinner, he told them to remove it, and, dressed as he was, threw himself down on his bed, and from sheer weakness and exhaustion, fell asleep.

Just as the bright star of the morning made its appearance in the sky, Gordon was awakened by a voice whispering in silvery tones the words "FAITHFUL EVEN UNTO DEATH;" and this was several times repeated. On opening his eyes, he saw opposite to him a minute speck or spark of light, about the size of a firefly, which, as he gazed in a state of half sleep half wakefulness, increased in size, becoming brighter and brighter, and at last assumed the appearance and form of a beautiful luminous opal, reflecting from its centre soft, pearly rays of light. After a short time its brightness appeared to diminish, and it gradually passed away altogether from his sight.

Gordon, arousing himself, sat up in bed; and being at last fully awake, his mind reverted to the occurrence of the previous night, and remembering what Elsie had said to him regarding her death at daybreak, he looked out of the window, and saw the slight purplish yellow tinge of light showing just above the horizon, which almost invariably in the East foretells approaching day; and he then felt that Elsie must have been very near him, and that her loving spirit had taken its departure to a brighter land.

It has been said—and that too by undoubtedly learned and sapient authorities (if we may credit the general belief and opinion of the world on this point)—that hearing voices, irrespective of, and disconnected with, the visible presence of the speaker, betokens madness, and that too of a most dangerous type. Now should this be so, it might have been possible—considering all Gordon had of late undergone, and which the reader has been made aware of—that his nervous system might have been so over-wrought as to have affected his brain, and brought him so nigh to insanity as to have caused him to hear, or think he heard the mystic words; and

see, or think he saw the still more mysterious light we have described. Should our readers prefer to believe this to be the case, we have no wish or desire in any way to interfere with, or throw even a shadow of á doubt upon this theory; but all we have to say is that Gordon did not think so, for he said to himself:—"At all events, there was no tinned lobster curry and Guinness' stout this time, to account for my seeing what I have seen; I was most positively wide awake, and what I have witnessed and heard is no vision, caused by a disordered digestion, or an attack of nightmare, whatever else it may have been."

It must not be forgotten, however, that Gordon was of an old Highland family, and that all Highlanders—but more particularly those of ancient lineage and descent—are given to be superstitious, and to believe in Family Brownies, Banshees, Pixies, Fairies, and such like, and in the gift of second sight—which now goes by the more modern appellation of *clairvoyance*. So that, under these circumstances, he may reasonably—we think—be excused for his credulity, more especially as, after all, he only placed reliance in what had never deceived him before—his own eyes and ears.

CHAPTER XXII.

GORDON had finished his breakfast and was sitting thinking seriously what he should do, when he observed what at first appeared to him to be a young man come towards him. He soon saw however that his visitor was Gunga disguised in male attire, she said—

"Sahib, I have come to tell you—as I doubt not you anticipate—that dear Elsie has left this world of care and pain for another. Early this morning, just as day began to break, she called me to her side and said 'Gunga, my sister, I now bid you farewell. Go to him you know of, and tell him my last thoughts were of him. Dispose of my earthly remains by causing them to be consumed by fire in the usual way, and Gunga, then gather up my ashes, and enclose them in the silver casket you will find under my pillow, and give them to my dear husband to keep as a memento of his Orissa wife. Tell him I do not wish him to attend my funeral, because I am most anxious that his secret and mine should be kept, and his presence there might be the cause of its being known. Will you promise me this, Gunga?' I promised, and very shortly after my mistress and more than sister breathed her last on my breast."

Gunga's promise to Elsie was religiously and faithfully fulfilled to the letter, and in a recess cut in the old stone wall of the Library at Abermore, there stands a small classically shaped silver urn containing the only earthly remains of Gordon's loving native wife. It bears engraved on it the simple word "Elsie."

Since the occurrences related above, a month or more

had passed, and by degrees Gordon's mind regained its wonted tranquility, and he was now able to contemplate his position with calmness.

He sat down and wrote to his wife Kate a long letter, relating all that had taken place, and ended it by saying that there were but three persons living who were aware of how they were situated, namely, Kate, Gunga, and himself, and that it was for the best that it should remain a secret between them. That he would very soon leave India—most probably never to return to it—as from what he could gather, his affairs at home were now in so prosperous a state financially, as to permit of his residing at Abermore, but that his very first act on returning, would be to go through the marriage ceremony again, but this would have no publicity, and he asked Kate to meet him at Plymouth on his landing there, and proposed their being again married at the small out-of-the-way Church of Newton, on the river Yelim, where they were quite unknown.

Having despatched this letter to Kate, and told her all, he found himself greatly relieved, and their future assumed a much brighter aspect than it had borne for a long time.

Two days before Gordon started for Bombay, from Ranepore, he received the following letter from Kate. It was dated the morning of the day Elsie died, and we cannot do better than transcribe it in full for the information of our readers, and let it speak for itself.

ABERMORE, *November*, 1859.

DEAREST HUSBAND,

The news of your probable return home, I need hardly say, has greatly rejoiced and gladdened my heart, and I count the days and hours until we meet again.

I have now, however, to relate to you one of the most extraordinary experiences I have ever had in my life; indeed, it is so wonderful, that I find it difficult to believe that it was not a dream.

As you will see by the heading of this letter, I am now

paying my promised visit to Abermore, having been kindly invited by your cousins, Mr. and Mrs. McLean, who as you know, have been residing at Abermore as your tenants, for several years.

On arrival here from London, I was received with a truly Highland welcome, and the greatest kindness, and I was shown to a room I was to occupy, called the "green room," which perhaps you know. It is in a Turret of the old Castle of Abermore, and looks out on a lovely view over the Beaulie Frith.

On the night of my arrival I retired to rest at rather a late hour, having spent a very pleasant evening with my host and hostess and their two lovely kind hearted daughters, Kate and Flora, who are twins and so like each other that it is difficult to tell which is Kate and which is Flora. On retiring to rest, I felt wakeful and excited, perhaps from the novelty of my situation, occupying a room, as a guest, in a place that belonged to you my dearest husband. I however tried to sleep, but found I could not, and after lying awake for some time I lit a candle, and placing it on the table near my bed, began reading a book which I had brought down from London with me. After about half-an-hour I heard the hall clock chime the hour of twelve, and I was just about to extinguish the light, for I now felt drowsy, when I heard three slight knocks at my door. At so late an hour I thought this very curious but thinking I was wanted for some reason or other I said "Come in." Instead of the door opening, as I expected, and someone entering, I saw a sort of cloudy, misty film begin to appear, which looked as if it was passing in through the closed door and forming and consolidating itself in front of it inside my room.

I gazed in wonder, not unmixed with fear. After a time, as I looked it took the form of a human being, and to my terror, advanced or rather floated past my bed, until it reached the wall on the opposite side to the door, and then

gradually passed out through it—much in the same way it had entered by becoming dimmer and less distinguishable, and at last disappearing altogether.

I lay some moments almost insensible, from fear, and was recovering myself, and trying to believe that what I had witnessed was all imagination, caused by overworked nerves and excitement connected with my visit to Abermore and its associations, in relating which you used to amuse and interest me when we were in hiding together in the Jogee's Cave. Just at this moment the candle, having burnt down to the socket, flickered once or twice and then went out, leaving me in darkness. This did not in any way improve the situation, and I lay perfectly still, thinking what I had best do when, to my wonder and amazement, I saw the following words begin to appear in luminous letters, which by degrees grew quite clear and distinct, just above the spot where the apparition — or whatever it was — had disappeared; they were:

"Virgin bride, by sorrows tried,
Wedded maid, by fate betrayed,
For thee, a sister yields her life,
To make thee, truly wedded wife!"

While wondering what this could mean, and almost insensible from superstitious dread, all of a sudden I was frightened out of the little sense yet remaining in me by hearing three loud knocks on the floor of the room above me, —which I knew to be used only as a lumber room and not to be inhabited. This last proved too much for my nerves, and I bounded out of bed and ran terror stricken to the nearest room I could find, and begged for admission.

This room happened to be occupied by Flora McLean, who at once opened the door and received me.

My looks caused her alarm, and she said "Dear Mrs. Gordon, what has happened? Come into my bed and share it with me, and tell me all about it. I have my own ideas on the subject, but they are only surmises, and when you are calmer and more at ease, pray let me share your anxiety."

I related to Flora everything that had occurred, and she said:—'Do you know I told mamma not to put you into the turret room, it has the name of being haunted; and, although the very nicest room in the Castle, possessing the most charming view from its windows, it has long been considered what we in Scotland call 'na cannie.' About two years ago, an occurrence of a mysterious nature took place in it, in which a Highland gillie of the name of McDonald was concerned. The Castle was crowded with guests and their servants, and the 'Turret' or green room was the only one vacant, for it had fallen somewhat into disuse. As a matter of necessity, McDonald slept in it, having given up his bed to some of the visitors' servants. McDonald did not indeed retire in the precipitate way you, dear, did to-night, from the room; but next day, when he was told to occupy it again for another night, he firmly expressed his determination on no account whatever to do so; and he emphatically added:—He would much rather sleep on the brae-side, among the heather, than pass another night similar to the one he had just experienced in the 'Turret Room.' He, however, persistently declined stating what his experiences were, and we were never able to get him to change his mind on this point. It may be as well to tell you that McDonald's father—who is still living—is said to possess supernatural powers, and goes by the name of 'Second-sighted Sandy McDonald;' and it is but a fair inference to draw, that some of his clairvoyant power may have been inherited by his son. But perhaps, my dear—not being of Highland extraction—you do not believe in 'second-sight,' and of course one has a perfect right to believe or disbelieve in such subjects; but we poor Highlanders have implicit reliance and belief in this power, and many are the startling proofs I could give you of the truth of it; but, dear Mrs. Gordon, this is not the time or place I should choose to do so, so we will say no more about it, and now you are safe and warm in my bed, let us go to sleep, and think no more of Banshees, Ghosts, Fairies, and Pixies. Good-night, dear."

Flora greatly comforted and calmed me, and shortly I fell asleep, and slept soundly until morning. This ends my adventure, my dear husband; think what you like about it, I did not again occupy the Turret Room, but continue to share Flora McLean's room and bed, and shall do so while I remain in this dear old haunted Castle.—Your affectionate and loving wife—Kate Gordon."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A FEW days after dispatching this letter, Kate received the one from her husband, narrating the occurrences connected with Elsie's death.

Kate would have liked to have taken Flora McLean into her confidence (for she had formed a strong friendship for this amiable young lady), but that was impossible, as it would have betrayed the secret of her marriage, and that her husband had told her was to remain one; and she herself quite felt the necessity of this.

So, though much puzzled and bewildered by the occurrences related by her husband, which she could not help seeing, were connected in some mysterious way with what she herself had experienced, she consulted no one, and decided to wait patiently, and put implicit trust in the kind Providence which had hitherto so unmistakably befriended and protected her, through such dangers and trials as she had undergone of late.

She consoled herself with the thought that Gordon would himself very soon be with her. And she now began to think what excuses she could make for leaving Abermore, and going to Plymouth to meet him on his arrival.

Kate knew her mother expected her to come back, on her return to London, and she felt she must give some good reason for not doing so.

After considering the matter well, she wrote to her mother, saying a very dear friend of hers had asked her to go and pay her a visit, and that she had accepted the invitation. At the

same time she informed her hostess (Mrs. McLean) that she was engaged to a friend in the south of England, who was anxious for her presence, and that she was very sorry to say she was obliged to shorten the period of her stay at Abermore, and intended starting that day week.

Having done this, Kate felt at ease, and the more so as what she had stated in both instances was the truth—and Kate had a great regard for the truth—for who was there in the wide world a greater or dearer friend than her husband?

So, after taking an affectionate farewell of Flora, and wishing good-bye to the others, she started for Plymouth, and on arrival there secured comfortable apartments in a house overlooking the Hoe and harbour of Plymouth, and awaited the arrival of the steamship in which Gordon had taken his passage from India to his native land.

In due time he arrived, and Kate was the very first on board to bid him welcome. After they had landed, and had been some time together, she—slightly blushing—said:—"Dear husband, as you know, we are wedded only in name, so for the present I have secured a room for you at a hotel near where I am living. I go by the name of Mrs. Bailie, and your room is taken for Major Shalto; so no one will ever know we are in Plymouth. I think you will allow this is what the Americans would call *smart* on my part, won't you? You must get a special licence, and this day week—if you do not think the period too short—we will again become man and wife. Do you approve of my cautious arrangements?"

"Yes dear," Gordon answered, "but could you not make it a little less than a week; seven days looks to me an unnecessarily long period?"

Kate replied:—"If, my dear, you can manage to get the license, and make all other arrangements sooner, Kate is not the girl to say no!"

And so the matter was settled, and a few days after Gordon's arrival, he and Kate stood before the Altar for the second time in their lives, and again solemnly swore to take

each other 'for better or for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and cherish each other until death;' and then Gordon wedded Kate with Elsie's ring, and gave her Elsie's loving message, thus fulfilling his solemn promise made to her on her death-bed.

The ceremony over, they spent a few happy days in a tour through the beautiful scenery of South Devon, and then made their way to London, to pay a visit to Kate's mother, to whom, at last, she had the pride and pleasure of introducing her husband.

Does the reader care to hear anything more regarding the other *dramatis personæ* who have figured in these pages, before bidding them good-bye?

The career and death of Tantia Topee, the famous Lieutenant of the blood-stained Nana of Bitoor, is a matter of history. How, after his master had given up all hope, and as an emblem of his entire separation from, and cessation of interest in his native land, had cut off one of the fingers of his right hand, and having burnt it, had cast the ashes to the winds, before entering the almost impenetrable forests and jungles of Nepal, where he is supposed to have assumed the disguise of a Fakir, Tantia, still unconquered and hopeful, placed himself at the head of the disorganised remnant of the rebel army, and led it hither and thither, now through the vast forest and mountains of Central India, across the Nabudda River to the Taptee, and there, foiled and turned, how he brought his band of forlorn and despairing followers north again, through Saugor and the native States of India and Gwalior, having been pursued and hunted by flying columns of British troops, until at last, deserted by his men, and only attended by a few personal adherents, he was betrayed by his trusted friend, Rajah Man Sing, to obtain for himself pardon and favour with the Gwalior State against which he had been in rebellion; and how, thus betrayed, Tantia was at last taken by surprise, and summarily executed.

Old Unto lived to a good old age in possession of the

land bestowed on him as a reward for loyal and faithful services. His greatest pleasure was to relate to his grandchildren the adventures and escapes of the days of the mutiny, and his most favourite story was how he trapped and secured Bolanath Teware, and having taken him a prisoner introduced him to the inmates of the Jogee's Cave.

His two sons follow the profession of their father—in which they were brought up, and are well known as the most successful "Shikares" in Bundlekund.

Gunga is proprietress of a fine large rent free estate, bestowed on her at the recommendation of Gordon for her faithful services. She has had many offers of marriage but she prefers remaining single and retaining her freedom. She has given old Balmukind Shastri a house on her estate in a pleasant Mango Tope of trees, wherein to pass the remainder of his days.—He is now a very old man.

On the death of old Doria his son Budrōo wrote to Gordon and asked permission to become his valet and Gordon kindly granted his request, and Budrōo, now grown from an impish looking little boy into a strong, stalwart, broad shouldered man, is much respected and somewhat feared in Abermore, where he goes by the appellation of the "Laird's own man."

He has had the greatest difficulty in preventing himself from being forcibly married to several bonnie Highland lasses of the household of Abermore under the supposition that he is a disguised Indian Prince, but he sturdily resisted their importunities and is still a bachelor, though a match between him and little Chunee who, as the reader may remember, accompanied Kate home as her personal attendant, is quite possible, and indeed, we may say very probable.

About fifteen months after the events we have related, namely, Gordon's happy union with Kate, there reclined on a couch placed near the open window in the Turret room of Abermore, so as to enjoy the invigorating air of the Highlands, on a bright warm summer's day, a lady, and by

her side in a bassinet there lay a smiling ruddy faced golden haired infant, and near both, bending over them, leant a gentleman, an old friend of the readers.

The lady was Kate Gordon, now a happy mother, the gentleman was Major Shalto Gordon her husband, now the Laird of Abermore, and the child they both looked so lovingly upon was their firstborn, a little girl of a month old. Gordon broke the silence which had lasted for some minutes and smiling, said "Kate, what shall we call her." The reply was prompt. "I read your thoughts in your face my husband, let her be named 'Elsie.'"

THE END.

GLOSSARY.

Atr-dan—Perfume box containing Atr of Roses.
Angraze—English.
Bahadur—Brave.
Bāniah—A grain dealer.
Bawache—A cook.
Bhagwan—God—the Deity.
Bhawane—"Parvote," or "Durga," wife of "Mahodo."
Bhie Sahiba—Noble Lady.
Bhut—A demon.
Biragee or *Byragee*—A Hindo mendicant, a beggar.
Bowlie—A well.
Brahman—A Brahman.
Budbukut—Unfortunate.
Budmash—Bad livelihood, or a bad way of living.
Budnusheb janwar—An unfortunate or unlucky animal.
Burra Mem Sahib—The lady of the house.
Burrakhana—A grand or ceremonious dinner.
Burre Dew—The great God.
Burkindazes—Jail guards.
Butassas—A native sweetmeat.
Coss—Two miles.
Chaddar—A sheet.
Chapatees—Thin cakes of unleavened bread—scones.
Chaprassé—A servant wearing a belt and badge, or "Chopras."
Charpoy—Native bed.
Chaudare—Name of a famous old city in Bundlekund.
Chechundra—A musk rat.
Chota Hazere—Early breakfast in India.
Chulha—A fire-place for cooking in.
Chumbar—A worker in leather.
Dal—Pulse, vetches.
Darogha—An overseer.
Davee—A Hindoo god (also fate).
Dhir—Name of an inferior tribe.
Dhobee's—Washerman's.
Ducks—A nickname applied to residents in the Bombay Presidency.
Durbar—A ceremonious reception by a person of rank or position.
Fakir—A holy man, a Derwish (also a beggar).
Faringe—An European.
Gāram pani low—Bring hot water.
Gehanām—Jahanum. Hades.
Ghadee—A throne.
Ghat—A place or passage over a river or lake set aside for bathing or washing.
Gonde—Hill tribe.
Gowlie—A herdsman.
Gulab pash—Bottle for sprinkling rose-water.
Haram Khore—Unworthy, worthless.
Haramzade—Low born.
Havildar—A native non-commissioned officer.
Howda—Elephant-saddle or seat.
Hugua—A pipe for smoking.
Hukēms—Physicians, doctors.
Huneman—The monkey god.
Huth Kurrahs—Handcuffs.
Jādūgar—A magician, an enchanter, a sorcerer.
Joken Bagh—The name of a garden.
Jauwar—An animal.
Jigne—Name of a small State in Bundlekund.
Kāla Phar—Black hill.
Khaki Bawa—A mendicant covered with ashes.
Khara pani—The ocean.
Khareta—A complimentary letter.
Khawas—The back seat on an elephant howda.
Kidmutghar—Servant.
Kismat—Fate.
Kolhares—Small axe.
Lota—A cup.
Mādār Khāna—A shop in which intoxicating drugs are sold.
Maidan—A plain, an open field.
Masjid—A mosque.
Metaigun—Street formed of sweet-shops.
Metaiwalla—Sweetmeat maker.
Mowha—A tree much resembling the oak in appearance.
Mulls—Nickname of persons residing in the Madras Presidency.

Munter—Charm.
Nāch—A dance.
Nāch girl—Dancing girl.
Nag—The Cobra di Capello.
Nāmāk harām—Unfaithful.
Nasib—Fate, destiny.
Nownur—Name of a town in Bundlekund.
Oodgowu—Name of a town in Bundlekund.
Orissa—A province in India, inhabited chiefly by hill men or hill tribes given to human sacrifices.
Pandus—A name given to the Bengale Sepahees.
Pani—Water.
Pān-supāri—Betel-nut.
Pashwar—Formerly the ruler of the Deckan.
Pashe Kubs—Hand dagger.
Parriah—An outcast.
Pugree—A turban.
Purda—A curtain.
Purdanasheen—A woman who does not appear in public.
Qui hies—A nickname given to persons living in the Bengal Presidency.
Rajh, or *Raj*—Government.
Ressaldar—Officer of cavalry.
Rustum—The name of a very famous man for his bravery.
Sahib—Sir.
Sahiba—Lady.
Sahib log—English gentlemen and ladies.
Samber—An elk.
Samp—A snake.
Sāwor—A horseman.
Seeks—Native policemen.
Sepahees—Native soldiers.
Sirkar—A government, or ruling power.
Shāmiyāna—A canopy, or sort of tent.
Shāstri—A man learned in the Shaster.
Sherestadar Fize—Native head of office.
Shikargāhs—Hunting grounds.
Shikare—A hunter.
Shitan, or *Shitam*—A devil.
Sumbala—a jungle shrub, or tree.
Sumblekar—Arsenic.
Tendwa—Panther.
Theremade—Matchlock.
Thug—A Thug or murderer, who kills by strangling.
Uncovenanted—Officers in the civil service of India who have been appointed in India by local administrations or governors.
Vakiels—Servants.
Wilāyat—Europe.

ERRATA.—On pages 281 and 287, *for* Chapters XXII. and XXIII., *read* XXXII. and XXXIII.

INDIAN NAMES AND TITLES.

Indian readers of the "Rane," of whom we hope there will be many, will doubtless notice some irregularities and mistakes in the spelling of the Indian names throughout the work. For this we must claim their indulgence, as it is to a great extent owing to the melancholy fact that the Author, who alone was competent to revise and correct this part of the work, suddenly passed away whilst it was in the press, and before it had received the final and careful revision he would doubtless have bestowed upon it.

[In connection with the above sad event it cannot be out of place here, without absolutely lifting the veil and revealing his identity, to mention that the deceased gentleman took an active part in the suppression of the great Mutiny of 1857, and afterwards filled a high civil post in India, and we have every reason to believe that this, his first and only work, is to a very great extent a reflex of his own experiences.—THE PUBLISHERS.]

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